


Memoria of Dr. John Thomson

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# BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

OF

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WITH

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE

OF

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

OF

## DR THOMSON.

JOHN THOMSON was born at Paisley on the 15th of March 1765. His father, who was originally from Kinross, was a silk weaver, and for some time had been rather prosperous in the world; but by imprudent confidence in a person with whom he was accustomed to have dealings in business, he became involved in difficulties, which obliged him ever afterwards to live in a humble and most frugal manner. His family was thus brought up with rigorous attention to economy, and his children put to work at an early age.

After being engaged for about three years in the minor operations of trade under different masters, John Thomson was, at the age of eleven, bound apprentice to his father for a term of seven years, and he continued to assist his father for nearly two years after his apprenticeship had expired.

During the whole of the period he had been thus employed, Mr Thomson had sought for knowledge from every source from which he could obtain it;—the conversation carried on in the workshop; the newspaper weekly read there; the books in his father's possession, which, however, related chiefly to doctrinal divinity; a circulating library, to which a very small pittance was weekly contributed; and books probably borrowed from some of his associates, or, at a later period, purchased with his own earnings. His disinclination for a mechanical employment, and ardent desire for a profession that would admit of, or require, his devoting a larger portion of his time to the pursuit of knowledge, must have been known from an early

period to his father, who, to promote that desire, would willingly have agreed that his son should be educated with a view to qualify him to become a minister among the Antiburgher Seceders, a branch of the Dissenting Church of Scotland, of which Mr Thomson senior was a member highly esteemed for his upright character and great piety. His son, however, declined to accede to this proposal, as he had for some time felt a strong predilection for the study of Medicine, and still hoped to be enabled to make that the great object and pursuit of his life. This the elder Mr Thomson had uniformly opposed, partly on the ground of expense, and partly in consequence of the unpromising and hazardous nature of the vocation which his son had selected. At length, an explanation took place between them, which determined the future destiny of Mr John Thomson. Some occurrence, possibly an appearance on his part of neglect of his work, gave occasion to his father exclaiming, that he wished from his heart he had been at the *learning* long before, as he saw he was never to do good at his *trade*,—adding, that it was too late, however, to think of changing, as his want of previous instruction rendered it hopeless to expect that he should now be able to qualify himself for a learned profession. Upon this, his son, producing a Latin book, and reading a few sentences out of it, to the father's no less delight than surprise, confessed having, about a twelvemonth before, without his father's knowledge, placed himself under a master capable of teaching him the Latin. From this time Mr Thomson senior withdrew all opposition to the wishes of his son, and as the son was often heard to mention, with an affectionate tribute to the considerateness of his father, he continued for several years to reside under the parental roof and follow the bent of his own inclination.

In accordance with the resolution thus adopted, John Thomson was, in 1785, when he had reached the age of twenty years, bound apprentice to Dr White of Paisley, in which capacity he continued for three years. His master was a man of superior education, in the possession of an extensive and varied library; and Mr Thomson's pursuits, whilst under his charge, partook much more of a scientific character than could have been

expected of a country apprenticeship. Writing nearly forty years afterwards, Dr White gave the following account of the manner in which these three years were spent. "His conduct was such as to deserve and obtain my warmest approbation. His zeal in acquiring medical knowledge was ardent and unremitting; and I still recollect, with much satisfaction, the many pleasing hours I passed with him in reading and studying the best authors on medical subjects, and especially in going over with him the excellent MS. lectures of the late celebrated Dr Cullen. Besides the knowledge thus acquired, he had frequent opportunities of visiting my private patients, and also those admitted to the public dispensary. On these occasions I frequently remarked in him a singular talent in discriminating diseases,—a talent which appeared to me almost intuitive. It may not be improper to mention, that he at this time also cultivated the departments of botany and chemistry with great ardour."

Mr Thomson's taste for general science, and for the several branches of natural history in particular, must have been greatly strengthened at this time by the intimate friendship which he had contracted with Mr William Lochead, who afterwards became superintendent of the botanic garden in the island of Trinidad. Some letters written by this gentleman when studying medicine in Edinburgh, during the winter session of 1786–87, to his friend Mr Thomson, have been preserved, and are interesting as evidence of an independent and enthusiastic temper of mind, which, had he lived, must have raised him to high eminence in the departments of science to which he devoted himself.

Another circumstance which, at that time, fostered these tastes in Mr Thomson, while it afforded the opportunity of gratifying them, was the favour conceived for him, and the interest taken in his advancement, by Mr Robert Alexander, brother of Mr Boyd Alexander, of Southbar, in Renfrewshire. This gentleman, who was himself a zealous naturalist, had stored his garden, in the immediate vicinity of Paisley, with a very rich collection of plants, and his library with a valuable collection of books in the several departments of natural his-



tory, particularly botany ; and of both of these his young friend was encouraged to make free use in the prosecution of his studies. Mr Alexander seems also to have readily provided such apparatus as was wanted for the chemical experiments in which they were jointly engaged.

At the beginning of the winter session of 1788–89, by which time his apprenticeship to Dr White was completed, Mr John Thomson went to Glasgow to attend the medical classes. He was introduced by Mr Alexander to the particular notice of Mr William Hamilton,\* who had a short time previously succeeded his father in the chair of anatomy in the university of that city, and who gave promise of rising to very great distinction as a teacher of this branch, and as a practitioner of surgery. He speedily gained Mr Hamilton's friendship and confidence, and in this way his anatomical studies were materially assisted. Besides prosecuting the study of anatomy with ardour, he attended the lectures of Dr Cleghorn, who was lecturer on chemistry in the college, an office which had been successively held by Cullen, Black, and Irvine. He also joined a chemical society, which contained several members who afterwards attained great eminence as practical chemists. The doctrines of Lavoisier had just been made known, and gave much interest to the proceedings of a society of young and ardent cultivators of chemical science, among whom it may be supposed that they found a readier reception than among those who, before adopting the new doctrines, had previously to unlearn the old. "It is consistent with my knowledge," says Dr White, "that during his studies at the University of Glasgow he acquired the esteem and confidence of the late worthy Professor Hamilton, and of that eminent lecturer Dr Cleghorn ; and from every thing I could learn from these gentlemen, his improvement kept pace with their zeal in teaching."

In the summer of 1789, Mr Thomson had the misfortune to lose his friend and first patron Mr Alexander, after an illness of some weeks, during which he sedulously waited upon him. The history of his connection with this gentleman presents

\* Father of Sir William Hamilton, Baronet, the late distinguished Professor of Logic and Metaphysics in the University of Edinburgh.

several persons in so agreeable a point of view, that we shall venture to dwell on it. Mr Alexander, who seems to have been a diligent collector of objects of natural history, particularly in the vegetable kingdom, was invited by Dr White to come to see a collection of dried plants which his apprentice had brought back with him from the islands of Bute and Arran, whither he had gone to recruit his health. Mr Alexander having expressed much satisfaction with the collection, Mr Thomson on the instant requested his acceptance of it, and this was the foundation of the interest Mr Alexander subsequently took in his advancement.

Mr Lohead also was a friend of Mr Alexander's, and in writing from Antigua in April 1789, in reply to a letter in which Mr Alexander had expressed his desire to make him some requital for botanical specimens which he had sent him from that island, he concludes by saying, "Any attention you can show to Mr Thomson will be the same as if it were to myself." Nor is the history less touching of the manner in which Mr Alexander's friendship continued to benefit his young protégé even after he was himself consigned to the grave. At the conclusion of the funeral ceremony, Mr Hogg, then manager of the Paisley Bank, afterwards of the British Linen Company's Bank in Edinburgh, coming up to Mr Thomson, said to him, that, of the numerous array then present, he believed they two were the parties by whom Mr Alexander's loss was most sensibly felt; that out of respect to his friend's memory he was desirous to be of service to him; and that he would endeavour to supply to him, as far as he could, the loss he had sustained in Mr Alexander's death. This engagement, during the remainder of his life, Mr Hogg most faithfully performed.

In the beginning of the winter session of 1789-90, Mr Thomson went to Edinburgh to pursue his medical studies. He has often been heard to mention that he attended, at the commencement of that session, the introductory lecture of Dr Cullen, but, being satisfied that the doctor was in too frail a condition to make much progress in his course, and the state of his own finances not admitting of his throwing away money, he did not enter to the class. In point of fact, Dr Cullen resigned a few

weeks afterwards, and died before the middle of the session. It is not precisely known what courses of instruction Mr Thomson attended during this session,—probably those of Drs Monro and Black ; but it is certain that a considerable portion of his time was passed with Mr Fyfe, a most accurate anatomist and amiable man, who officiated as Dr Monro's assistant in the anatomical rooms.

In September 1790, he was appointed assistant-apothecary in the Royal Infirmary ; in the month of June following, assistant-physician's clerk ; and, in the following September, house-surgeon, under the designation of surgeon's-clerk. His predecessor in this last office, Mr Clark, as Mr Thomson has been known frequently to mention, had availed himself of the opportunities which the hospital afforded for making the pathology of lumbar abscess a subject of particular investigation, and had satisfied himself of its uniform connection with vertebral disease,—a conclusion which Mr Thomson subsequently confirmed by numerous *post-mortem* examinations made in the hospital.

In his residence in the Royal Infirmary, Mr Thomson was particularly fortunate. It may easily be conceived how much influence the character of the matron must have on the comfort of the resident officers, as well as of the patients, of such an institution. Long afterwards, Mr Thomson paid the following tribute to the memory of the lady who at that time occupied this position. “ There are many who must remember well the daily visits which Mrs Rennie made through the wards of the Infirmary ; her unceasing efforts to add to the comforts of the patients ; the tenderness with which she inquired into the circumstances of those who appeared to be in peculiar distress ; the numberless little acts of kindness which she performed to them ; the strict charge which she took of the character and conduct of the nurses ; her friendly and maternal attentions to the clerks ; and the impartiality, equanimity, and propriety with which, in the faithful discharge of the duties of a laborious and difficult situation, she conducted herself in all her intercourse with the servants, medical officers, and managers of the Infirmary. It is pleasing to record the virtues of such a cha-



rafter ; and in paying the tribute of our respect to the memory of departed worth, to point out Mrs Rennie as a model for the imitation of her successors."

Mr Thomson was singularly fortunate also in the young men with whom he was associated in the duties of the house. One of these was Mr John Allen, afterwards private secretary and confidential friend of the late Lord Holland. With Mr Allen, up to the time of his death in 1843, he maintained an uninterrupted friendship, to the powerful influence of which over the fortunes of his life he has himself borne testimony in the dedication, to Mr Allen, of the first volume of his *Life of Cullen*. Another was the late Dr William Russell, who was afterwards member of the Medical Board of Calcutta, and was created baronet on his return from a mission to Russia in 1831, for the purpose of investigating the progress of the cholera in that country. Dr Russell was the brother-in-law of the late Mr Andrew Wood, surgeon in Edinburgh, and through him originated Mr Thomson's acquaintance with that excellent man. To Mr Wood, in after life, he professed himself, in the dedication to him of his *Lectures on Inflammation*, bound by the remembrance of the kind attentions, counsel, and support for which he had been indebted to his friendship, without which that work would probably never have been composed, nor his attention been directed in a particular manner to the study of surgery.

In the beginning of the winter session of 1790-91, he became a member of the Medical Society,—an institution which has in very many instances served as an arena both for exhibiting and for strengthening the powers of those who have received their education in the medical school of Edinburgh. About that time its business was carried on with even more than its usual spirit ; and that Mr Thomson bore his share in its labours might be inferred from the fact of his having, at the beginning of the following session, been nominated one of its presidents,—an office in which he had the pleasure of having conjoined with him, besides his friend Mr Russell, Dr Richard Fowler, now of Salisbury,—a gentleman who early manifested that taste for scientific investigation by which, through his

long career of professional usefulness, he has been most honourably distinguished. Dr Fowler, in reference to the period of which we are now speaking, says, "During three years that I passed in the University of Edinburgh as a student of medicine, I had the pleasure of a frequent intercourse with Mr Thomson, of the most intimate, and, I may add, with respect to myself, of the most instructive kind. A stronger, more active, or more informed mind than his, certainly was not to be found within the limits of my acquaintance. As his studies were directed ardently, and almost exclusively, to the profession of which he has become so distinguished an ornament, his example had perhaps more influence than that of any other individual in exciting the emulation of others."

According to the established usage of the Medical Society, Mr Thomson was called upon, during his first session as a member of it, to write upon a "Case" and a "Question." The case which fell to him was one of eatarrh, and his paper is interesting in this respect at least, that it expressly refers by name to Dr Lubbock and Mr Allen, as having separately proposed that view of the theory or intimate nature of inflammation which, in his lectures on this subject, published more than twenty years afterwards, he again ascribed to them. The question upon which he wrote, viz., "What are the Agents which Nature employs in the consolidation of the Strata of our Globe?" shows how much his tastes inclined to the consideration of subjects of natural history. In the subsequent session he completed the duties he owed to the Society as a writer by a paper on the question, "In what manner can the mechanism of the Passions be explained?"

After residing for nearly two years in the Royal Infirmary, Mr Thomson resigned (31st July 1792) his appointment as house-surgeon, in consequence, as the minutes bear, of the laborious duties of the office having proved detrimental to his health. Soon after this he proceeded to London, and entered himself as a pupil at Mr Hunter's school in Leieester Square. In this year Mr Hunter finally relinquished his course of lectures in favour of his brother-in-law, Mr, afterwards Sir Everard Home. Mr Clift speaks of his early recollection of the



diligence with which Mr Thomson pursued his studies at the time he was in Mr Hunter's dissecting rooms in the year 1792 ; and Sir Everard Home, in reference to the same period, says, "I witnessed your ardour in the pursuit of medical science, applauded your zeal, and endeavoured to give you such facilities as were in my power, to encourage you in your labours."

It is believed that the more immediate object of Mr Thomson's visiting London at this time was to qualify himself for teaching anatomy, a design which he afterwards relinquished, partly in consequence of difficulties connected with the outlay that would have been necessary, and partly in consequence of the high impression which he had formed of the abilities of Mr John Bell, who about that time entered on this department of instruction in Edinburgh.

Mr Thomson returned to Edinburgh early in 1793, and in the following year, his friend, Mr Hogg, having kindly interposed his credit with the bank of which he was manager, for the advancement of the necessary funds, he became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, a body with which his connection was destined to become of a still closer character, and to be the source of much honour to both parties. He seems forthwith to have taken measures for renewing his connection with the Royal Infirmary, as it is recorded in the minutes (of 2d September 1793) that permission was granted for his attending as surgeon along with Mr Brown.

Upon his leaving the Infirmary in 1792, Mr Thomson had entered into engagements to form an alliance in business with Mr Arrott, a fellow of the College—a gentleman of some peculiarity of manner, but of very considerable abilities and of great kindness of heart. Under Mr Arrott's hospitable roof he continued till the autumn of 1798, seeing a large amount and a great variety of society.

In 1794, his friend Mr Allen began to deliver a course of lectures on physiology,—a course which, by the testimony of all competent judges, was singularly distinguished at once by the multitude of facts which it placed before the easy comprehension of the hearers, and by the philosophic spirit with which

the whole was arranged and animated. The manner in which Mr Thomson's own time was employed during this period, it would, in a full narrative of his life, be very important to trace, as there can be no doubt that there were then laid the ground-works of many of his subsequent investigations; but we cannot at present enter upon this inquiry. Chemistry, at all events, occupied a considerable share of his attention; and, in 1798, he began to render the fruits of his labours in this department available to himself and the public, by the publication of the first volume of an edition of Foureroy's Elements of Chemistry and Natural History, with the Philosophy of Chemistry prefixed. In publishing this edition, he adopted the translation of the "Elements" by Mr Nicholson, and an anonymous translation of the "Philosophy;" but to almost each chapter he appended copious notes, in the composition of which, he says in the advertisement, he had had it chiefly in view to exhibit a short abstract of the most interesting discoveries and improvements that had been made in the science of chemistry within the period of the previous twenty years, and to make accurate references on every subject of importance, to the various original memoirs, essays, and writings from which farther information might be derived. "By intermixing in this manner," he observes, "the history of modern chemistry with a work so long and so deservedly popular, I have endeavoured to assist those who may be desirous to prosecute this interesting science beyond the narrow limits of an elementary treatise." The second volume of this work was published in 1799, and the third and last in 1800. In speaking of it, Professor Jameson says, "This edition, as I well remember, was received in a distinguished manner by the illustrious author himself; and your illustrations were considered by your countrymen as a fine specimen of elegant taste and composition, combined with varied and profound philosophical views."

In the winter of 1799-1800, Mr Allen, with whom Mr Thomson had now formed an alliance in business, went to London for the purpose of prosecuting the study of anatomy. During that winter the late Earl of Lauderdale came to reside in Edinburgh, and being, with that ardour which characterized

him in all his pursuits, very desirous to prosecute the study of chemistry, Mr Thomson was introduced to him as a person qualified to assist him. Thus originated his acquaintance with that distinguished nobleman, whose uniform kindness and assistance he always felt had laid him under a deep debt of gratitude.

Under Lord Lauderdale's auspices, a chemical class was formed, consisting chiefly of gentlemen connected with the Parliament House, and which met at Mr Thomson's private residence. Writing to Mr Allen in January 1800, he says, "I delivered my ninth lecture to-day. If I continue to like lecturing as well as I have done hitherto, I shall certainly try to get a larger class from the Parliament House for summer. I speak from short notes, and the embarrassment I experienced for the first days begins to wear off." After the completion of the course, he writes, "I have resolved on repeating my lessons again in summer; but as the number I expect will be too large for my room, I shall be obliged to go to your class-room."\* But in a subsequent letter he says, "Dr Hope has announced a course of chemistry for the gentlemen of the Parliament House. It is to last from the 12th of May till the 12th of July. I shall not go, in consequence of this, to (the class-room in) Surgeon's Square, as it would have the appearance of my wishing to oppose myself to the Doctor." His zeal for the advancement of chemical science, however, suffered no abatement, as is shown in the following extract from a letter addressed to Mr Allen, which will not be the less interesting from the incidental glimpse it furnishes of the scientific relaxations of two individuals who subsequently attained great eminence in the councils of the nation; and with both of whom Mr Thomson

\* "I am extremely happy," he adds, "in the prospect of being now able to carry into effect the plan I have so long intended for the winter,—I mean a course of lectures on the elementary parts of Chemistry, *Materia Medica*, and Pharmacy." So early as 1793, his friend, Dr William Russell, inquires after a work on Pharmacy, in which he was then engaged; and Mr George Bell, in writing to him from London in 1797, apologizes for not having yet obtained for him notes of certain courses of lectures on *Materia Medica*, then in progress of delivery in the medical schools of the metropolis. But he must soon afterwards have abandoned all thoughts of engaging in such a work.



had the pleasure of living on very friendly terms. "Some of the members of the Natural History Society waited on me some time ago to talk to me about the state of the Society. In the course of conversation I could perceive that ——'s salary was considered as an insuperable obstacle to the prosperity of the Society in its present circumstances. Various plans of relief were proposed, and I at last suggested the turning the Society into a Chemical Society, that should provide itself with an apparatus, and occasionally make experiments. This proposal has since been talked of among the members, and is, I believe, universally approved of. In mentioning it to Horner, he proposed an alliance with the Academy of Physics. Brougham, in the meantime, came home, and has entered keenly into our views. I have made the continuance of ——'s salary a condition with each of them in private, and the general belief is, that, instead of any want, we are likely, when the plan can be carried into effect, to have an overflow of members. It has, on that idea, been suggested to restrict the number of ordinary members to thirty. The two chief difficulties which at present occur to the plan are, the want of a proper place, and an arrangement which shall combine the interest of the Society with the operations of the experimental committee. I have not yet said any thing of the proposal to ——, but with his leave I shall, under him, be acting secretary till you return. I wish you would make an offer to the Society of your class-room to meet in till they can provide themselves with a place. Perhaps I am too sanguine, but I conceive that, if we can give to the infant society a good organization, it may become an institution which you will have pleasure in patronising. We shall be able to draw into it, I hope, all the young men of the place who have any turn for physical researches. It is proposed to meet in summer. Brougham is to write you in a day or two. He looks well, and his present appearance would give you much satisfaction. Horner and he are both particularly anxious that you should approve of the plan of a Chemical Society."

His subsequent letters during the continuance of Mr Allen's residence in London contain reports of the proceedings of the Chemical Society, and of the topics he was going over with

Lord Lauderdale. An extract from one, dated 12th June, may be quoted, as illustrative of the ardour of that nobleman, to which reference has already been made. "Lord Lauderdale and I made the galvanic experiment last week, and I exhibited it to the Society on Saturday. We are getting tubes with gold wires and glass stoppers to try its effects on caustic liquids, and we are getting a very broad plate of zinc made, to try whether the increase of power be in proportion to the increase of surface. In that case his Lordship's whole service of plate will be converted into a galvanic battery!"

But whilst thus indulging in his fondness for chemical pursuits, and endeavouring to render these subservient to his immediate necessities, Mr Thomson never lost sight of the profession on which he had embarked. Writing to Mr Allen, of date 20th December 1799, he says, "I shall not expect much anatomical information from you, but, indeed, you must treasure up for me every hint in surgery. Notes, however short, of Cooper's Lectures, may be of much use." "Be assured," he writes early in 1800, "I am not to be diverted by chemistry or any other occupation from the prosecution of surgery." Again, a few months later, "I wish to be able to assist you in the anatomical labours you propose; and so long as you continue fond of dissection, be assured I shall never suffer myself to be drawn away from the study of anatomy and experimental surgery." And in May, after noticing that "Mr Russell\* has been rather anxious about my giving in to chemistry," he announces his purpose of "lecturing, next session, if you approve of it, and if my health will permit, on the principles and practice of surgery." The allusion to experimental surgery, in the preceding paragraph, was probably suggested by that inquiry into the changes occurring in the osseous system in the processes of Necrosis and Callus, in which he had been engaged in the previous summer with his friend and pupil, Dr Alexander

\* Reference is here made to the late Professor James Russell, to whom Mr Thomson had dedicated his edition of Fourcroy, and of whom it is elsewhere recorded, that when Mr Russell succeeded, in 1803, in getting the chair of Clinical Surgery in the University instituted, he was desirous to have Mr Thomson associated with him in that chair.

Hermann Macdonald of Hamburg, the results of which appeared in the Inaugural Dissertation published by that gentleman on graduating in September 1799.

The time, however, had now come when it was necessary for Mr Thomson to make a more decided election of the leading objects of his pursuits. In 1800, Dr Gregory addressed to the managers of the Royal Infirmary his well known "Memorial," in which he attacked the mode of attendance of the surgeons in the hospital, promiseuously by rotation, which at that time was followed. A communication on the subject having been made by the managers to the College of Surgeons, and a diversity of opinion having sprung up among the members of that body as to the proper course to be pursued, each fellow was invited to give in his own suggestions. Mr Thomson, on this occasion, published "Outlines of a Plan for the Regulation of the Surgical Department of the Royal Infirmary," in support of a motion which Mr Andrew Wood had submitted to the College, suggesting a middle course between the then existing mode of general rotation and the appointment of permanent surgeons, which some had been inclined to recommend. The party then predominating in the College advocated an adherence to things as they were; and very intemperately directed their censures against those who supported opposite views. Among others, Mr Thomson was blamed for having submitted his proposal to the consideration of the managers of the Infirmary, instead of to that of the College itself; and Mr Andrew Wood was censured for reading to a committee of the managers,—of which body he was a member,—an extract from a protest that had been lodged by Mr Thomson against a decision of the College, without accompanying it with the answer on the College's behalf. It is not necessary to trace the progress of the lawsuit which arose between the majority of the College and the managers of the Infirmary on this occasion. Suffice it to say, that, fortunately for humanity, the courts of law decided that the managers were entitled to select the persons whom they considered best qualified for the performance of the duties of surgeons, irrespective of any bargain supposed to have been entered into by the predecessors of the two parties engaged in



the litigation. Meanwhile, however, the managers had resolved to nominate six surgeons, on the principle recommended by Mr Wood, and advocated in Mr Thomson's pamphlet; and accordingly, before the end of the year (1800), they agreed on a list in which Mr Thomson's name was included; his associates, all of them his seniors, being Messrs Russell, Wardrop, Law, Inglis, and Brown.

Mr Thomson entered on the teaching of Surgery soon after his appointment as surgeon to the Royal Infirmary. In a letter addressed to Mr Keate, the surgeon-general, which must have been written in September 1803, he mentions his having been employed for three years in teaching Surgery, and his having given, during that time, two courses of clinical lectures in the Royal Infirmary, and two courses of lectures on the Principles and Practice of Surgery, in a private theatre.

A subject which very early engaged Mr Thomson's particular attention as a teacher of surgery, was the natural means by which hæmorrhage from wounded arteries is suppressed,—conceiving this doctrine to be, as he was accustomed to say, the main pillar on which all speculations regarding the operative part of surgery must depend for their support. It has been repeatedly noticed in other publications than the present, that the inaugural dissertation on the subject of divided arteries, published by Dr Jones of Barbadoes, on graduating at Edinburgh in 1803, and which he afterwards republished in a more extended form in his Treatise on Hæmorrhage (1805), derived a large share of its value from the assistance afforded him by Mr Thomson. The precise share in Dr Jones's investigation which Mr Thomson claimed for himself, in the absence, as he conceived, of suitable acknowledgment on the part of the author, appears in the following extract from his surgical lectures; in which, however, it may be permitted to say, that delicacy of feeling and regard for his pupil have perhaps contributed to diminish the force of expression with which so unwarrantable an appropriation might have been characterised.

“ There are two views of this subject (the natural suppression of hæmorrhage) which, from the first moments of lectur-

ing in this place, I have endeavoured to inculcate and explain at some length. The first of these is, that the natural suppression of hæmorrhagy from divided arteries is not a simple event, but one in the production of which several powers concur. The second view which I have been accustomed to take of this subject is, that each of the experimenters who have endeavoured to ascertain the means by which nature suppresses hæmorrhagy, has added something valuable to our knowledge of these means, and that these experimenters have erred chiefly by directing their attention to one step or stage of this process, and by neglecting to take a general and comprehensive view of the whole. These are views which you will find explained and illustrated at great length in a most excellent treatise on the process employed by nature in suppressing the hæmorrhagy from divided and punctured arteries, by the late Dr Jones of Barbadoes. They are views which I have reason to know were new to Dr Jones when he first heard me deliver them in these lectures. That gentleman was led to consider the subject of hæmorrhage, in consequence of my explaining to him, in various private conversations, the opinions which I entertained with regard to this process. He had made choice of the absorbent system as the subject of inquiry for his inaugural thesis. I suggested, and strongly recommended to him an experimental investigation into the means by which nature suppresses hæmorrhage. It was with no small pleasure I prevailed upon Dr Jones to undertake this investigation, because, among my medical acquaintances, I have seldom known one who, from previous acquirements, steady attention, and a cautious observation and accurate description of the phenomena which presented themselves in his medical inquiries, was better able to conduct it. How far Dr Jones had the candour to acknowledge the use that he made of the views which he adopted from my lectures and conversations, or the assistance which I lent him in most of the experiments which he performed while in Edinburgh, the perusal of his treatise will inform you. To be obliged to allude in this manner to one in whom I placed unlimited confidence, must ever be to me a matter of the most painful regret and mortification. After Dr Jones had left Edinburgh, he continued his researches, and made



several new, original, and most interesting experiments, the details of which you will find in his treatise,—a work to which I can refer with confidence those who are desirous of acquiring a minute and accurate knowledge of everything which is at present known, not only respecting the natural means by which hæmorrhage is suppressed, but also respecting the use and application of the ligature to arteries, the most useful of the means which art has ever employed to suppress hæmorrhage.”

“ The only circumstance which Dr Jones has not made out completely to my satisfaction is the formation of the internal clot.” “ The conical internal clots which adhere by their bases to the closure of the arteries, have appeared to me to be composed of secreted organizable coagulable lymph, attached often to the artery by one side as well as by their bases. This opinion of the formation of the internal clot I had formed before I prevailed upon Dr Jones to undertake the investigation of this subject. I often communicated to him my opinions with regard to the internal clot in conversation, and I stated to him, just before the publication of his thesis, these opinions still more distinctly in writing.” “ In consequence of the conversation in which this statement was made, Dr Jones added the supplement which you will find at p. 72 of his thesis, printed here in 1803. In this supplement Dr Jones has given an extract from the last of the memoirs of M. Petit, containing an opinion very similar to that which I had formed, and am still inclined to adopt. I do not find that Dr Jones has made any addition to our knowledge of this subject (the formation of the internal coagulum), in the very valuable experiments which he made after he left Edinburgh, nor in the account which he has given of it at page 160 of his treatise.”

On the renewal of hostilities between this country and France in 1803, the country, as is well known, was thrown into a state of much military excitement by the apprehension of an invasion; and in connection with the arrangements for putting Scotland in a state of defence, the establishment of a military hospital at Edinburgh was contemplated. Previously to being informed of this proposal, Mr Thomson had resolved, at the particular recommendation of the late Sir Thomas Maitland, to give, during the

winter session of 1803-4, a course of lectures on the nature and treatment of those injuries and diseases which come more peculiarly under the care of the military surgeon; and as there were but few authors upon these subjects in this country, he employed himself in studying the best French and German writers who had treated of them. The idea of giving a course of military surgery he was the more readily induced to adopt, partly, as he himself says, by the circumstances of the times, and partly by his knowledge that the army and navy during the impending momentous conflict, must in a great measure be supplied with surgical officers from among the young men educated in the medical school of Edinburgh, who, from the narrowness of their circumstances, could not afford to attend the hospitals in London, but must go immediately from the Edinburgh school into actual practice. Entertaining these views, he listened with no small degree of pleasure to an unsolicited offer which Mr Benjamin Bell made, of endeavouring to procure for him a place in the military hospital, about, as was understood, to be established in Edinburgh.

In furtherance of this object, Mr Thomson went to London in the autumn of 1803; and through the influence, among other parties, of Sir Walter Farquhar, to whom he was strongly recommended by Dr Gregory, Mr Keate was induced to enter into his views. As the rules of the service required that the whole surgical department of the army should be filled by those who had begun at the lowest step in the service, viz., that of hospital mate, he was appointed to that rank. In speaking of this arrangement at a subsequent period, he himself says:—“ In 1803, when an invasion was dreaded, I was attached to the Medical Military Staff of Scotland, with a small salary, it is true, but with directions from the Surgeon-General, that I should be employed only in superior duty, and with private assurance from the same quarter, that, on the event of a military hospital being established in Edinburgh, I should have the situation I wished for in the chirurgical department.” And Mr Keate, in introducing him to Dr Rogerson, then principal medical officer in Edinburgh, says, “ Mr Thomson has been strongly recommended to me, and is now appointed hospital mate to the

proposed general hospital in Edinburgh. He is a gentleman of superior talents, and will no doubt, if the exigency of the service requires it, prove highly useful in the superior departments of his profession."

Mr Thomson did not allow the time spent by him in London whilst on this errand to be consumed in the business of solicitation. On the contrary, he turned it to great account in the way of his own professional improvement. The pathological collections of the metropolis especially engaged his attention. Mr Howship mentions that he applied himself with unwearied assiduity and peculiar diligence to the study of the various departments of pathology, as exemplified in the divisions of Mr Heaviside's Museum; and speaks with admiration of his "most unceasing application to the laborious task of possessing himself, in the least possible time, of all the useful information that could be obtained by a visit to London;" and Mr Clift alludes to his having made at this time a close examination of Mr Hunter's collection, particularly the pathological part of it, "in a manner so particular as had never till that time been done by any visitor, and, indeed, not frequently since, except by the college professors." The ample notes of the preparations in these and other collections, which he made upon the spot, and which are still preserved, as well as his own private letters, fully corroborate the statements of these gentlemen.

Mr Thomson was accustomed to mention, that, the evening before leaving London on this occasion, he dined with Mr Abernethy, previously to going to hear him lecture at St Bartholomew's Hospital, and that Mr Abernethy allowed him to make choice of the subject of the lecture. The subject he chose was Tumours, on which Mr Abernethy had not yet published; and as this was too extensive a topic to be finished in one night, Dr Jones took notes of the subsequent lectures, and forwarded them to him in Edinburgh. These notes are also still preserved, and the subject was one on which, both in his surgical and in his pathological lectures, Mr Thomson used to dilate, always rendering to Mr Abernethy the praise to which he was entitled for his attempt at a scientific classification of morbid growths.



Mr Thomson had at an early period of his surgical studies become impressed with the necessity, towards the elucidation of the subject of hernia, of a more accurate anatomical examination of the regions of the body in which ruptures are liable to occur. Writing to Mr Allen early in 1808, he says, "Marshall, I am told, has studied the subject of hernia. It forms an admirable subject for illustration with drawings and preparations;" and of a later date in the same year, in reference to some preparations illustrative of hernia which Mr Allen had mentioned having seen, he writes, "If the preparations on hernia are very interesting, I wish you would get any kind of outlines of them, however rude." His critical notice of Camper's *Icones Herniarum*, and his short comment on Dr Heberden's article on *Ileus*, both in the second number of the *Edinburgh Review* (for January 1803), and his *Observations* on Mr Hey's chapter on *Strangulated Hernia*, in the third number of the same *Review* (for April 1803), as well as other articles in the same work, all show how much his mind was at that time occupied with that branch of surgery.

It was probably during the visit to London, to which reference has just been made, that he saw reason to abandon a design, relative to hernia, in which he had been for some time engaged, as explained by himself in his lectures on Surgery, when speaking of the anatomy of the groin. "This is a part of Anatomy," he was accustomed to say, "of which you will find no good general description before the publication of Mr Astley Cooper's splendid work upon hernia, though many parts of it separately had been well described. I was so much impressed with the importance of the anatomy of this region, that I had very nearly completed the description and delineation of the different parts which enter into the formation of the groin, with a view to publication, before I had heard of Mr Cooper's being engaged in investigating the subject of hernia. I was too well aware of the superior advantages which he possessed, to think of continuing my design. Mr Cooper's descriptions and plates contain almost all the information which we possess respecting the anatomical structure of the groin, and confirm the

views which I had taken of this part, while they add considerably to their extent and to their importance.”\*

The portion of Mr Cooper's work relative to Inguinal Hernia was published in 1804, but the portion relative to Crural Hernia did not appear till 1807. In 1805, the late Mr William Wood, on being required to prepare a Probationary Essay for the College of Surgeons, which he was about to enter, made choice of this subject; and with that candour which characterized him in all the relations of life, frankly avowed how much he had been indebted to Mr Thomson, Professor of Surgery to the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, for the information which I have received on the subject, not only from his valuable lectures, but also from his very accurate dissections of the parts concerned in the disease, which he was so kind as to allow me to witness.” This gentleman has informed us, that on his return from studying in London in 1804, he was strongly urged by Mr Thomson to set about the preparation of a Treatise on Ruptures, and was promised the use of all his materials, as well as of his advice in its preparation. Mr Wood, from a misapprehension, as we conceive, of his own qualifications, shrank from the task. How well a work of the description which Mr Thomson had projected for his young friend was soon afterwards executed by Mr Lawrence (1807) the profession is well aware.

In connection with the subject of Hernia, Mr Thomson had paid particular attention to the natural process of repair occurring in Intestines in which, by injury or disease, solution of continuity has been produced. His experiments on this question of surgical pathology he communicated to Mr Cooper, who introduced a notice of them into his work on Inguinal Hernia. After mentioning some experiments of his own, in which the intestine was returned into the abdomen, where it rested against the wound in the parietes, and the ligatures were left hanging externally, Mr Cooper proceeds to quote his friend Mr Thomson, Lecturer on Surgery at Edinburgh, as having, with the assist-

\* Among his notes of his communications with Mr Cooper during this visit, there occurs the following observation:—“ Mr Cooper's dissections of the termination inwards of the internal oblique and transversalis, much more minute and correct than mine; not so his account of the external fascia, nor of the distribution of the tendon of the external oblique.”

ance of Drs Farre and Jones, performed a series of experiments, from which it appears that, in the animals which were the subjects of them, not only the *intestine* may be returned into the cavity of the abdomen, but the *ligatures* which are applied upon it; and that no apprehension need be entertained of these ligatures being separated into that cavity to produce the inflammatory effects of extraneous bodies, seeing that they are in fact separated into the intestinal canal, and discharged from it by the natural passages. Mr Cooper next proceeds to notice a curious difference in the facility with which a longitudinal and a transverse wound of the intestine unites. "It has been shown," he remarks, "that transverse wounds heal readily; but with respect to the longitudinal, they have a contrary tendency;" and in illustration of this principle, he quotes the experiments of Mr Thomson, "the result of which," he observes, "will be found extremely curious."

Mr William Wood, in a correspondence with the late Dr Monro, in the course of 1807, mentions that "Mr Thomson, in the two courses of his lectures, which he had had the pleasure of attending, described at great length the different modes of stitching divided intestines that had been recommended from the time that Celsus first mentioned the practice to the present day. But in showing the results of his experiments, which Mr Cooper has described, he took particular pains to caution his students from inferring, that, because the practice of stitching intestines had often succeeded in brute animals, and in a few instances also in the human subject, it was one which should be followed in the diseased state of the intestines usually accompanying strangulated hernia." This subject of the process of nature in repairing wounds of the intestines was, as is well known, at a subsequent period, very fully discussed in a most valuable monograph by Mr Travers, a gentleman whom Dr Thomson had the happiness of numbering among his pupils, and the still greater pleasure throughout the whole of his after life of counting among his friends.

Mr Thomson again delivered, during the winter session of 1803-4, his course of lectures on the Principles and Practice of Surgery; and in the succeeding summer (1804) he carried into



effect his intention of delivering a short course on Military Surgery. In writing in the subsequent autumn to Mr Keate, he says, "I have taken the liberty to inclose for your inspection a short prospectus of a course of lectures on Military Surgery, which, in addition to my usual winter course, I gave this last summer at Edinburgh. I trust you will approve of the desire which I have manifested by the delivery of this course to promote, in as far as in me lies, the good of that department of the public service over which you preside. That I may be able to devote my time exclusively to the learning and teaching of Surgery, I intend to give up private practice for two or three years, or at least while I am continued in the place of resident hospital mate, which I now hold by your goodness."

The beneficial influence of these courses was very speedily perceived by those interested in the improvement of surgical education in Edinburgh, and by none more promptly than by Mr Benjamin Bell and Mr Andrew Wood; and they revived a wish that had repeatedly been expressed in the College of Surgeons, to have the teaching of Surgery placed in this city upon a permanent and respectable footing. Accordingly, shortly before the commencement of the winter session, 1804-5, a memorial was presented to the College, signed by Messrs A. Wood, George Wood, James Law, William Farquharson, Benjamin Bell, William Brown, James Bryce, Andrew Wardrop, and James Arrott, pointing out the advantages likely to result from the institution by the College of a lectureship or professorship of Surgery. The College approved of the suggestion, and Mr Thomson was, as was afterwards stated by Dr Erskine, "universally considered by his professional brethren as better qualified than any one else of their number for the office of their professor, which, accordingly, they unanimously conferred upon him." The extraordinary attempts that were made to frustrate this measure were recorded by Mr Thomson in a Statement of Facts published in 1806; of which a considerable part was reprinted in a pamphlet, afterwards to be noticed, published by him in 1826, under the title of Additional Hints respecting the Improvement of Medical Instruction, &c. As a part of the scheme of taking on itself to provide instruction in Surgery for the medical

students attending the Edinburgh School, and, as is well known, on Dr Thomson's suggestion, the College of Surgeons resolved to institute a Museum. To this he made over a collection which he had been himself forming for some years. In the formation and extension of this Museum he was zealously assisted by his young friend and pupil, Mr James Wardrop, who, in a few years afterwards, by the publication of the first volume of his *Morbid Anatomy of the Human Eye* (1808), and of his *Treatise on Fungus Hæmatodes* (1809), evinced how thoroughly he had been imbued with the conviction that a knowledge of the true nature of diseases is the only safe foundation of rational practice. The museum thus commenced has gone on increasing, under the fostering care of the College, partly by the contributions of its members, of whom none was more assiduous in its behalf than Mr Thomson continued to be; partly by the late Dr Barclay's bequest of his valuable museum; and partly by the purchase of that of Sir Charles Bell;—till it has attained a most honourable position among the anatomical and pathological collections of the empire.

In receiving the appointment of Professor of Surgery to the College of Surgeons, Mr Thomson proposed to the College, that medical officers of the army and navy should be allowed to attend the lectures delivered under its patronage without paying the usual fees. This proposal was immediately adopted by the College; and accordingly his lectures were, on this footing, attended every year subsequently by varying but considerable numbers of officers belonging to these departments of the public service.

The expectations of the College in instituting a professorship of Surgery, and conferring it upon Mr Thomson, were speedily realized. Dr Erskine, in writing to Mr Allen in the beginning of 1806, relative to Mr Thomson's claims to an appointment presently to be more particularly noticed, says, "He has, by delivering several full and separate courses on Surgery, already performed a service of the greatest benefit to the public; for, since the commencement of his lectures, a very material improvement has taken place in the qualifications of the young men whose education, as surgeons, has been confined to this place, and they are now found to possess such a stock of pro-



professional information as, in former times, I am convinced, was rarely to be met with among them. The truth of this I have an opportunity, as one of the examiners of the College of Surgeons, in some measure to ascertain by personal observation. It is also, I conceive," adds Dr Erskine, "no slight consideration, that, in order to do justice to this very important course, he has withdrawn himself, for a time at least, from private family practice." In reference to the same subject, the late Mr George Bell, at a later period, speaks of the "increased and increasing improvement in the qualifications of candidates for surgical diplomas since the establishment of the professorship of Surgery by the Royal College of Surgeons in 1804. The beneficial effects of this professorship have been made manifest over a large portion of this country, and have been very generally acknowledged, not only by practitioners in civil life, but also by the medical officers both in the army and navy. No one acquainted with these facts," says Mr Bell, in addressing himself to Dr Thomson, "can hesitate to attribute a great part of this visible and important alteration to your exertions."

In 1806, on the formation of Mr Fox's Administration, Mr Thomson was encouraged by Lord Lauderdale to apply to his Majesty's Government for a commission to be Professor of Military Surgery in the University of Edinburgh. Earl Spenser, at that time Secretary of State for the Home Department, after a personal interview with Mr Thomson, and minute inquiry into the objects and probable usefulness of an institution for the instruction of medical students intending to enter the service of the army and navy, advised his Majesty to create this professorship, and recommended Mr Thomson for the appointment, which he accordingly received.

A fact which came to light during the preparation of his commission may give some idea of the extent to which the bitterness of party feeling was at that time carried. The clerk in the Secretary of State's office, to whom the preparation of this deed was referred, reported to Lord Spencer that a *caveat* against Mr Thomson's receiving any appointment from the Crown had been lodged in that office for a considerable time; and that it had, on a previous occasion, prevented his receiving

an appointment of a different sort, even after it had been promised him by two different ministers. We have been assured that an impression has prevailed in some quarters, that Mr Thomson, at an early period of his medical career, took a share in political movements of a character hazardous to public tranquillity, and particularly that he was a member of the association known under the name of the Friends of the People. These notions, however, are utterly erroneous. Whilst warmly attached to popular rights, he was persuaded that these can be soundly advanced only by moral and intellectual persuasion, and not by physical force. And it was with him a matter of extreme regret, that his friend Mr Allen, who, in general, was most particularly distinguished by calmness and soundness of judgment, allowed himself to be entangled in proceedings which had the not uncommon consequence of extreme measures, viz., that of strengthening the hands of those against whom they were directed. Of the motives by which Mr Allen was influenced in the conduct he pursued at that time, we have, it is believed, a correct statement, in the following extract of a letter from their common friend, Dr W. Russell, to Mr Thomson, when in London, of date 20th November 1792. "Allen has left the hospital, but notwithstanding your good advices, is still by far too deeply engaged in democratic politics, I think. I have constantly urged him to *give out*, as I conceive it is not only inconsistent with his present situation, but occupies his time, and introduces him to a public notice which, at best, can be of no advantage to him. There is to be a public meeting of delegates to-morrow, after which I hope he will be persuaded. His fears are, that from the *volcanic* heads which, certainly at least here, conduct them, viz., Muir and Johnson, they will be misled; but I am afraid that, though he were even to devote his whole time, this will not be prevented, unless some of the more *staid men* join, who rather at present keep 'back.'" And a passage in one of Mr Allen's own letters to Mr Thomson, of date 4th January 1793, points at one of the difficulties experienced by a man of spirit in quitting a cause in which he has once embarked, even when he comes to disapprove of the means by which it is pursued. "I have given up their societies, but on

the whole I believe they are still increasing. If I ever return, while in my present situation, it will be merely to prevent any imputation of desertion in the hour of danger."

Mr Thomson has been heard frequently to mention, in illustration of his anxiety to steer clear of the "volcanic heads" referred to by Dr Russell, that having occasion to speak with Mr Allen, at a time when he was in attendance on one of the meetings of delegates, he abstained from going himself to the place of meeting, and sent a messenger to fetch him; and that on Mr Arrott informing him that Margarot, who, as a medical man, had brought an introduction to Mr Arrott, from a common friend, was to dine with them on a particular day, he immediately replied that he was to dine that day at Stenhouse Mills, the house of Mr Allen's stepfather, Mr Cleghorn, where all Mr Allen's friends at that time experienced the comforts of a kind home. In giving these explanations, it is not meant to suggest a doubt as to the strength of Mr Thomson's political opinions, or to offer any apology for them, but only to establish the fact, that, in entertaining these opinions, he was very guarded in giving no countenance to measures for their advancement by which there was risk of the public tranquillity being put in peril.

The issuing of Mr Thomson's commission, as Professor of Military Surgery, again renewed that strife which each successive attempt to improve the system of teaching Surgery in Edinburgh had created. Some of the particulars are related in the "Additional Hints" already referred to. It has often been disparagingly objected to the creation of the chair of Military Surgery, that much more advantage would have resulted had a chair of ordinary Surgery been at once instituted in the University; but those conversant with the actual circumstances of the case will allow that as much was done by the creation of this chair, for benefiting surgical instruction, as could be accomplished at the time.

On the 11th January 1808 Mr Thomson obtained from the University of King's College, Aberdeen, the degree of doctor in medicine; and early in the same year, being then one of the acting surgeons of the Royal Infirmary, he printed "Observations on Lithotomy; being a republication of Dr James Douglas' Ap-



pendix to his History of the lateral Operation for the Stone, and of the other original papers relative to Mr Cheselden's invention and improvement of that operation." To these papers he added, "A proposal for a new manner of cutting for the Stone."

It will not be necessary to enter here into a discussion raised by the late Dr Yelloly, as to whether Dr Douglas has given, in his Appendix, a correct account of Cheselden's final operation. It will be sufficient to state that the main object of Dr Thomson's own "Proposal" was to point out the practical objections to the use of the gorget, in its multiplied forms, as a cutting instrument in lithotomy; and to suggest a certain procedure whereby the knife may be employed in this operation, so as to obviate the risk of wounding the rectum with it. His manner of operating differed, as he himself stated, from that which was then generally practised in this country, in the instruments used in making the internal incision, in the direction, in some cases, of the incision itself, in the constant introduction of the finger into the bladder, previous to that of the forceps, to ascertain the size of the internal incision, and, if possible, also the size and situation of the stone; and in employing the finger as a conductor for the knife, in all cases in which it may be necessary to enlarge the internal incision. This mode of operation he put in practice in five cases on which he operated for the stone in the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, during the years 1808-9. One of these, a child of four years of age, proved fatal. Another case, as having along with the first, led accidentally to a change in Dr Thomson's later career in practice, requires some farther notice. In this case so great a difficulty occurred in seizing the stone, that it was necessary to put the patient to bed for a time, in order to restore quiet and procure rest. The renewed attempts by Dr Thomson some days later also proved unsuccessful, and he having become fatigued and anxious by his long-continued efforts, gave the instruments into the hands of Dr Brown, who was assisting him, and who, with considerable difficulty, and after repeated attempts, at last succeeded in removing the stone. The patient was finally dismissed cured.

Shortly afterwards Mr John Bell published an account of these two cases in which he strongly condemned the proceedings; but

certainly without just reason; for all unprejudiced men who knew the circumstances, not only applauded the manly courage which led Dr Thomson in the first instance, at some risk to his professional reputation, to dismiss the patient to rest, but they also expressed their entire approval of the operative procedure, and their conviction that, in his hands, it could only be from some unknown peculiarity in the seat of the stone that the difficulty in seizing it was experienced. Dr Thomson himself attributed the difficulty to the stone being partially encysted in the coats of the bladder; but as the patient recovered, the real state of the case was not ascertained. The attention drawn to the case by the unfavourable remarks of Mr Bell appears to have made a deep impression on Dr Thomson's feelings,—an impression which was increased by the circumstance, that the managers declined to accede to his request that a formal inquiry into the cases should be instituted; and in the vexation of the moment, Dr Thomson, perhaps unnecessarily, and to the great regret of his friends, resigned his appointment in the Infirmary.

Dr Thomson might no doubt have treated the attack, as he had treated many previous attacks from the same quarter, with silent contempt; and it is scarcely possible to doubt, that such is the line of conduct which, in the cool exercise of his judgment, he would have recommended to another. That he followed a different procedure is probably to be accounted for by the influence which he thought the statements of Mr Bell might exercise on the public mind, and by what he conceived was expected from him as surgeon to a public institution. Nor can it be altogether overlooked, that the state of Dr Thomson's own feelings at this time was ill calculated to render him tolerant of a charge of the nature of that which had been preferred against him. In point of fact, the practice of operative surgery was extremely disagreeable to him. He possessed a practised dexterity of hand and great quickness of eye, but he was deficient in that freedom from commiseration which Celsus declares to be requisite in a surgeon. Both previously to the performance of any serious operation, and during the doubtful period of the subsequent

progress of a case in which he had operated, he was oppressed with an anxiety that went so far as to deprive him even of that moderate share of rest which he was accustomed to allow himself. No wonder if, under these circumstances, an attack characterized by Mr John Clerk, afterwards Lord Eldin, in language which we shall not venture to quote, and which induced Professor Playfair to send back to the author a presentation copy of the work in which it was contained, on the ground that he never received a present for which he could not return thanks,—should have disturbed the equilibrium of Dr Thomson's temper, and led him to follow its promptings rather than the counsel of attached but unruffled friends.

But whatever diversity of opinion may arise on this point, there will be none as to the spirit which—when Mr Bell was no more—dictated the following tribute by Dr Thomson to his merits as a promoter of surgical science,—“Mr John Bell, in the course of lectures on anatomy, which he gave for some years in Edinburgh, delivered lectures on select subjects of Surgery also, which were listened to with the greatest attention by his auditors. His Discourses on Wounds, and his Observations on Anæmism, in particular, have, since their publication, been read with much eagerness and delight by all ranks of medical men, and have contributed in a powerful manner to promote the study of these dangerous affections; and, of course, to lead to more correct views than had been previously entertained with respect to their nature and treatment.”

In 1811, Dr Thomson renewed his attempt to obtain a connection with the military hospitals, but in this he was unsuccessful. In the memorial which he presented on the occasion to the Army Medical Board, he expressed his wish to extend in future the course of lectures he delivered in the University to the principal diseases which, in different regions of the world, come more immediately under the care of the military surgeon. He mentioned also that he had annually delivered a course on Military Surgery in the University, and that, in the previous winter, he had read these lectures without fee to the students of Surgery in Edinburgh, nearly 200 of whom had availed themselves of the opportunity thus afforded them.



In the course of the same year (1811) his friend Dr Erskine, to whom, on retiring from general practice, he had as far as possible transferred his business, was seized with a fatal illness, of which he died. It was Dr Thomson's wish that his friend Dr John Gordon, who was then residing with him, should have taken Dr Erskine's place; but Dr Gordon being averse to form any engagements that would interfere with his duties as a teacher of Anatomy, declined this proposal; and Dr Thomson resolved himself, with the assistance of his friend Mr Turner, who had for some time been acting as Dr Erskine's assistant, to take up the business, which he accordingly did.

About this period Dr Thomson seems to have taken a considerable interest in the success of a Chirurgical Society, then existing in Edinburgh in connection with the College of Surgeons. In the number of the Medical and Surgical Journal for April 1812 (viii. p. 249), it is mentioned, that "at a late meeting of the Chirurgical Society of Edinburgh, Professor Thomson gave an account of a particular species of counter-fracture which he had repeatedly had occasion to observe in the examination of the crania of persons dying in consequence of injuries of the head. This is a variety of counter-fracture which seems to be more frequent in its occurrence, and more determinate in its position, than any of those hitherto described by practical authors. It occurs in the basis of the cranium, and runs along that portion of the temporal bone which forms the roof of the cavity of the tympanum, and of the *meatus auditorius externus*. In some instances it exists on one side only of the head; in others it occurs on both, sometimes with, and at other times without, a fracture of the sphenoid or occipital bones." To this notice are appended some of the more general results which Dr Thomson deduced from the particular histories of the cases he related.

In 1813, he published his Lectures on Inflammation, exhibiting a view of the general doctrines, pathological and practical, of Medical Surgery. This work was received with universal approbation, and speedily insured for itself a permanent position in the medical literature of the country. It was recommended by the Professor of the Practice of Medicine in the

University as a treatise of great merit, communicating much information, and likely to be most useful to the student. All this it did, and a great deal more; it supplied a deficiency long felt in the literature of medical and surgical Pathology, and exerted a remarkable influence on the subsequent progress of these two departments of science. It may be proper here to advert somewhat more particularly to the services which the publication of this treatise rendered to the medical profession.

Previous to the time when Dr Thomsen's Lectures on Inflammation appeared, the only work which the student, desirous of obtaining a knowledge of the general doctrines of this, the most important of all the pathological conditions of the economy, could consult with advantage, was the Treatise of John Hunter on the Blood and Inflammation, originally published in 1794. Mr Hunter's work was remarkable for the number of new and important facts which the author had adduced to elucidate the pathology of inflammation; for the great originality of the doctrines; and for the strong tendency to simplification, both as respects pathology and treatment, which was evinced in the application of principles to practice. Probably no work contains so many new and curious facts regarding the state of the blood and the vascular system in health and under various states of disease; and certainly no work published before that time contained so many important and instructive observations on the phenomena of inflammatory diseases, and their constitutional effects. With all these advantages, the work of John Hunter was, and continues to be, extremely difficult to study and to comprehend. The method of arrangement is perplexed in the extreme; and the author often throws out the most important facts and hints in the place where they are least expected to be found. The statements contained in this treatise were interesting, because they were new and pointed; but it was difficult to remember them, in consequence of their not being at all times arranged in the most methodical order. Mr Hunter had also suggested for consideration many points which he had not himself fully discussed, or sufficiently explained. In short, the work of John Hunter required to be read and studied several times before its doc-



trines could be thoroughly understood, and their actual bearing and applications could be estimated; and as few possessed the fortitude and perseverance requisite for an undertaking so arduous, the work was too often, after the perusal of a few chapters, laid aside in despair; and eventually it had come to be an authority much more frequently quoted and spoken of than carefully studied.

Several of these evils, and perhaps others, Dr Thomson doubtless felt in studying the work of John Hunter, and expounding its doctrines to his pupils; and it was manifestly one great object of his lectures on Inflammation to render the doctrines of this surgeon more easily intelligible, and thereby to cause the merits of his work to be more thoroughly appreciated. It is certain that he arranged these doctrines in a much better order, and explained them in a much clearer manner than their author had done; and by his own comments on, and additions to, Mr Hunter's statements, he exhibited a more connected, systematic, and complete view of the pathology of the process of inflammation, and its effects, than had ever before been taken. Respecting the *state of the vessels in inflamed parts*, or the *proximate cause*, as it used to be called, of inflammation, Dr Thomson advanced a large amount of new, original, and, in general, accurate information. This subject had been a favourite subject for discussion in the Medical Society; and from the contending hypotheses maintained in these discussions, in which Dr Thomson was wont to take an active part, he was led to investigate the subject experimentally, and by the aid of the microscope. By applying the results of his experiments to explain and rectify the theory of inflammation proposed in 1765 by Vacca Berlinghieri, Dr Thomson was enabled to present a view of the pathological characters of this process more complete and accurate than any previously adduced, and one which has formed the basis of the efforts of many subsequent inquirers.

One of the most important parts of Dr Thomson's Lectures on Inflammation was the examination of the modifications induced in this process, and its effects, by the difference of the textures which are affected with it. Though Dr Carmichael Smyth had given a short view of this subject in 1790, yet Dr

Thomson certainly had the undisputed merit of giving the first clear and comprehensive exposition of it, elucidated by the lights of morbid anatomy and pathology, and enriched with much new information.

The history which he gave of the *constitutional effects* of inflammation was remarkable for its philosophical views, and for the correct and ingenious manner in which he traced, after Whytt, the effects of morbid sympathies. This subject had been very much neglected, surgeons too often confining themselves to the mere local treatment of inflammation. Dr Thomson inculcated strongly the necessity of general, and the value of medical treatment.

Not less original and instructive were the views given in this work of the *effects* of inflammation, especially suppuration and ulcerative absorption. In explaining the nature of these morbid processes, Dr Thomson performed the part of a faithful and intelligent interpreter of the doctrines of Hunter, which, without his exposition, must have remained in a degree of obscurity quite impenetrable to the great body of students. In the history of the different forms of gangrene, also, Dr Thomson showed himself to be an equally able and learned expositor of the multiplied and often contradictory facts which had been recorded on that subject. His description of traumatic gangrene, of the gangrene of the aged, and the state of the arteries in these affections, as well as his account of the gangrene which arises from the use of spurred rye, presented specimens of the most accurate and precise generalization on these subjects; while his remarks on their treatment, and especially on that so confidently recommended by Mr Pott in the senile gangrene, showed the philosophical spirit with which he estimated the powers of remedial agents in diseases.

The most unequivocal proof of the high value of these lectures is found in the facts, that in a very short space of time large portions of them were transferred to the pages of Mr Samuel Cooper's Surgical Dictionary, by which the knowledge they contained was diffused most extensively through the profession at home; and that translations of the work itself appeared in France, Germany, and Italy, and a reprint in America. The

English edition was soon exhausted; and copies became so rare, that when they appeared they were bought with avidity at four or five times the original cost.

The publication of this work, in short, exerted both at home and abroad a most beneficial influence on the study and practice of surgery. It gave a new direction to the minds of the reading and reflecting portion of the profession; and all subsequent essays and monographs on the subject of inflammation have been written, more or less, upon the principles therein adopted, and present distinct traces of the influence of this example.

By the publication of the part of his course relating to inflammation, Dr Thomson was enabled, in his public instructions, to devote a larger amount of time to various other important subjects. He had now lectured on the principles and practice of surgery for thirteen years; and as every year had enabled him to introduce from foreign authors, and the experience of the best civil and military surgeons, improvements and rectifications, his course of lectures may be regarded as having at this time, 1814-15, &c., reached its highest degree of perfection. This, therefore, may be not an inappropriate point in our narrative at which to offer a few observations relative to Dr Thomson's merits as a teacher of surgery.

The great peculiarities in Dr Thomson, as a lecturer, were the large amount of accurate and useful information which he communicated, the clear and methodical order in which it was presented, the intense interest and ardent zeal which he excited in his audience, and the sound spirit of criticism and judgment with which the different opinions, propositions, and theories that came under review were examined. At the time when Dr Thomson began to lecture on surgery, no separate or distinct course on that subject was delivered in Edinburgh, either in the University or by any private teacher. Surgery was taught only as an appendage to anatomy; and the result was, that a few lectures, hurriedly introduced at the close of the anatomical course, long formed the only instructions in surgery given in this city. It is easy to perceive that from such courses comparatively little benefit could result. Little attention could be paid in them to surgical anatomy; and none could be given to



the pathology of surgical diseases. The important and essential part of surgery, viz., the phenomena, causes, and effects of local diseases, was either neglected or treated in a cursory, meagre, and unsatisfactory manner. These lectures were, indeed, merely short courses or demonstrations on the principal surgical operations,—their history and their different modes of performance,—a view of surgery at once narrow and unjust. Dr Thomson was among the first who recognised and showed the necessity of establishing the teaching of surgery on a more extensive and stable foundation, and who supplied the serious defect that had existed in the education of surgeons, by delivering a complete course of lectures on surgery, presenting a systematic view of surgical anatomy, surgical pathology, and surgical operations. In these lectures the student found not only ample and correct information on surgical anatomy, but what was nowhere else given, either in a satisfactory manner or in any form at all, a large amount of information, often entirely new, on the pathological history of surgical diseases. He impressed on his pupils the necessity of studying well the phenomena and progress of those diseases which the surgeon is expected to treat, of discovering their natural tendencies and terminations, and of ascertaining, if possible, how much or how little they require of manual or proper surgical interference. He always studied also to distinguish and appreciate the exact influence of remedies and operations; and it is believed that his example has tended more than that of any individual to diminish the number of operations, and to direct the minds of practitioners to the great use of medical treatment in surgical diseases, and to the value of what has been called Medical Surgery. In short, his course upon surgery was unequalled in importance and judicious selection; and when students found how much information was communicated in an interesting manner in these lectures, they became indispensable to every one who desired to qualify himself for the conscientious discharge of his professional duties.

Dr Thomson devoted much attention in his course to the diseases and injuries of the arteries and veins, to the pathological history of aneurism, to the subject of injuries of the head, to the anatomico-pathological history of hernia, to the



pathological history of calculous and urinary affections, and to that of diseases of the joints ; and all his pupils, who were competent to judge of his instructions at the time of receiving them, or who have since remembered them, will be able to bear testimony to the novelty as well as accuracy of his information, and to the high value of these lectures. His lectures on syphilis and the use of mercury, and the progressive but decided course which he adopted in demonstrating the pernicious effects of this vaunted remedy, form a most conspicuous era in the history of modern pathology and therapeutics.

It was not only, however, as an instructor who communicated correct and useful information that Dr Thomson showed his pupils what surgical pathology really is, and what the scientific surgeon ought to be. By examining not only opinions, hypotheses, and theories, but facts and statements of facts in the spirit of candid criticism and inquiry, he taught his pupils to observe, to think, and to reason for themselves ; and by setting them the example of original and vigorous, yet perfectly logical reasoning, he laboured to train their minds to that species of mental exercise which is of all others the most useful to the medical practitioner, — the faculty of estimating the true value of medical doctrines, and the actual merits of various remedial measures.

Dr Thomson had established the practice of teaching surgery in separate courses on a foundation so firm and stable, that it was soon adopted by several able instructors. Students found that they could not obtain the necessary information in this branch of study without attending such a separate course ; and the different boards followed the example set by the College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, by requiring such attendance on the part of candidates for their licences. Of this great and beneficial change in surgical education in Scotland, Dr Thomson must be regarded as the originator ; and whatever benefit has thereby accrued to the profession and the public must be ascribed mainly, if not solely, to his sagacious discernment of what was required by the actual state of surgical science. It must, indeed, be regarded as singular that in the University of Edinburgh no provision for teaching this important branch of medical education was made, till, by his influence and at his suggestion, a profes-

sorship was established by the government then in office, so late as 1831. If it was requisite to teach the practice of medicine in a separate course of lectures, not less necessary surely was it to devote a distinct course to the principles and practice of surgery.

Of the effect of Dr Thomson's surgical lectures on the students, an eye-witness gives the following account :—

“ It was in the winter of 1815 and 1816 that I attended the lectures of Dr Thomson. At that time, partly from the great enthusiasm felt in the study of medicine and surgery, partly from the great number of army and navy surgeons who came to Edinburgh to renew or complete their studies, the number of medical students was great and annually increasing. The lecture-room was crowded daily to its greatest capacity. There must have been at least 250 or 280 auditors, and of these about 50 or 60 were men who had been in the service of the country for ten or fifteen years. During lecture every one listened with the deepest attention and interest, eager to carry away every word of the discourse, which was always animated and often eloquent. The impression it produced was evinced by the conversations and discussions that ensued after lecture. The army and navy surgeons especially used almost invariably to carry on a keen discussion on the merits of the various doctrines propounded in the lecture; and these discussions were often continued or revived in the Medical Society, or in the Clinical Wards of the Royal Infirmary. The proper treatment of gunshot wounds, the comparative advantages of primary and secondary amputation, the causes of traumatic tetanus, traumatic gangrene, and hospital gangrene, all formed points on which every individual present was induced to state his opinions, and the results of what he had himself seen and done. These discussions among the army and navy surgeons were often of great use to the mere student, by making him think, read, and inquire, and thereby leading him to increase his knowledge, and render it precise; and all this intellectual exertion was unquestionably to be ascribed to the influence of the surgical lectures of Dr Thomson.”

But the course of lectures delivered by Dr Thomson was valuable, not simply as a body of chirurgical instruction. From

the method of arrangement which he adopted, and the subjects of which he treated, it followed that much information on medical pathology was communicated. Hence not only were his lectures on inflammation equally useful to the physician as to the surgeon, but his lectures on cutaneous diseases, on injuries of the head, on wounds of the chest, on hernia, and on syphilis, led him to communicate a large amount of information of the utmost value and interest to the physician.

From these circumstances it resulted that the course of Dr Thomson, indispensable to the well-educated surgeon, was not less necessary to the physician; and hence there were few physicians at that time educated in Edinburgh who did not feel the importance of attending these lectures with the utmost regularity. Dr Thomson, indeed, evinced as intimate a knowledge of medical diseases, and especially of those depending on organic changes, as of those falling under the proper management of the surgeon; and he was destined to exemplify, in his own case, the principle, that the practitioner who is trained fully and sufficiently in surgical pathology, necessarily becomes acquainted with medical pathology, and that, however the arts may be disjoined in practice, in study they must be conjoined and made to assist each other.

In the summer of 1814, availing himself of the termination of the war to execute a purpose he had long had at heart, Dr Thomson, accompanied by his friends, Dr Robert Renton, now of Edinburgh, and the late Dr Thomas M'Kenzie of Newcastle-under-Lyne, made a tour for the purpose of examining into the state of medicine in the different schools of Europe. "In the course of this journey," says Dr Renton, "we visited France, Italy, Austria, Saxony, Prussia, Hanover, and Holland. Dr Thomson examined minutely into the modes of medical and surgical practice followed in the public hospitals of those countries. His practical knowledge of diseases, and his extensive acquaintance with the works of the best medical writers of the different countries through which we passed, procured for him everywhere the respect and attentions of the teachers and practitioners of medicine, and facilitated greatly the attainment of the objects which he had in view. The minute



accuracy, also, with which he examined the anatomical and pathological collections at the Ecole de Médecine in Paris, at Pavia, Vienna, Berlin, Leipzig, Halle, Göttingen, Amsterdam, and Leyden, evinced an ardour in his researches which I and my fellow-traveller, well as we knew Dr Thomson's zeal in professional pursuits, could not observe but with feelings of surprise and admiration."

On the 7th of February 1815 Dr Thomson became a licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, a measure though not necessary, yet expedient to one who was now acting as consulting surgeon, and occasionally as consulting physician.

In the ensuing summer he again returned to the Continent, with a different object, but one not less indicative of his anxiety for professional improvement. "Upon hearing of the result of the battle of Waterloo," as he has himself said, "I immediately resolved to proceed to Belgium, that I might have an opportunity of observing the medical and surgical condition of the men who had been wounded in that battle. My friend Dr Somerville, principal medical officer in Scotland, to whom I communicated my intentions, instantly formed the wish of accompanying me thither, and gave me encouragement to hope that the Medical Board would not disapprove of the objects which we had in view, in wishing to visit the different military hospitals in Belgium. We had the satisfaction to find, on arriving in London, that the Director-General approved warmly of our intentions, and was disposed to afford us every assistance in his power to carry them into execution. Dr Somerville accordingly received a letter from the Medical Board, accepting the offers of service, and containing instructions and recommendations with regard to me in every respect calculated to procure the opportunities of observation which I so much desired. We left London on the 4th and arrived in Brussels on the 8th of July; and, conformably with the instructions which he had received, Dr Somerville reported himself, and introduced me to the senior medical officers there, Mr Gunning and Dr M'Neill. We made known to these gentlemen our desire to visit the different military hospitals under their charge, and to have an opportunity of observing the condition of the wounded whom these hospitals

contained. They received us with the cordiality of friends, entered readily into our views, and introduced us without delay to the other officers who composed the medical staff at Brussels. By these officers we were everywhere received with the most flattering marks of attention; they did everything in their power to forward our examination of the wounded; and by their frank, open, and liberal communications on the individual cases of their patients, facilitated greatly the attainment of the objects of our inquiry."

The duty which he had thus zealously undertaken, Dr Thomson most faithfully and laboriously discharged. "On the late occasion of the severe action in Flanders," says Sir J. M'Grigor, "he was the only one of the three gentlemen then honoured with acting appointments who devoted himself entirely to the professional duties for the relief of the wounded; and the testimonials which reached me of the services he rendered both to the patients and to the medical staff by his advice were most gratifying." "At Brussels, after the battle of Waterloo," says Deputy-Inspector Irwin, "I knew you to be consulted on every case of moment, and you never failed to convey the most satisfactory information and useful advice, both as physician and surgeon, which your judgment and research so qualified you to communicate." "I have had the comfort and gratification," says Deputy-Inspector Gordon, "of experiencing the benefit of your able counsel and advice at the bed-side, on many important and trying occasions, in the hospitals of the wounded at Brussels. On this subject, I need only say, that as I appreciated them highly at the time, so do I still feel gratitude and complacency at the recollection of the advantages derived from your assistance and co-operation." "When I first had the pleasure of your acquaintance at Brussels in 1815," says Deputy-Inspector Hennen, "I was struck, in common with every officer of the staff, with the enthusiastic zeal and indefatigable attention with which you investigated the wounds, and the endemic and other diseases which at that time abounded in the military hospitals. And I can never forget the professional emulation which you excited among the junior officers,—the friendly and unpretending style in which you communicated information,—

and the ready and available assistance which you offered to us all."

Shortly after his arrival at Brussels, Dr Thomson was apprised by a communication from the Secretary of the Army Medical Board, that, on being made acquainted with the disinterested manner in which he had resolved to proceed to the Netherlands, for the purpose of assisting the wounded in the late glorious battles, they had deemed it advisable to submit to H.R.H. the Commander-in-Chief the advantage that might be derived from his accepting the appointment of acting staff-surgeon; and the Director-General having accordingly recommended this measure, H.R.H. had been pleased to approve of it, in a full assurance of the benefits that would result to the service from the exercise of his talents in the military hospitals. On his way home from Belgium, Dr Thomson conceived the idea of applying for a continuation of his appointment as an army surgeon, on the understanding that he should be attached to the military hospitals in Edinburgh. His position as Professor of Military Surgery had made him long regard a connection with the military hospitals as highly desirable; but he had recently come to attach to such an appointment the greatest importance, from the opportunities it was calculated to afford him of prosecuting his inquiries into the necessity and expediency of the administration of mercury in the treatment of syphilitic diseases, a subject which, for several years previously, he had been prosecuting in the necessarily circumscribed field of private practice. He accordingly addressed a memorial to the Duke of York, praying for the permanent appointment of surgeon to the forces. The memorial was referred to the Director-General of the Army Medical Department, who returned it with the expression of his hope that the Commander-in-Chief would be pleased to honour this request with his sanction. "Being strongly impressed," the Director-General added, "with the opinion that great and permanent advantage may be derived from the employment of Dr Thomson, and from the public being enabled to avail itself of his talents in forwarding the education of students intended for the army, and perfecting those already holding appointments in



it in the higher branches of scientific surgery, I beg leave most respectfully to recommend for the approbation of H.R.H. the Commander-in-Chief, that Dr John Thomson may be appointed surgeon to the forces." The appointment accordingly took place.

On his return to Edinburgh, Dr Thomson occupied himself in reducing the observations which he had made in the British military hospitals in Belgium into the shape of a Report, which he published in the following year, along with a very valuable discourse upon Amputation. This report he inscribed to the Duke of York, by whom his services had been viewed in so gracious a manner. The great variety of important surgical topics concisely but forcibly handled in this report, show how much Dr Thomson was at home in this department of the healing art, and how diligently he must have availed himself of the comparatively limited opportunities occurring in civil practice for making himself acquainted with the more immediate and more remote effects of injuries and wounds of every description.

It is not to be supposed that so signal a mark of favour as had thus been conferred on Dr Thomson could fail to excite jealousy in some quarter or other; and, accordingly, strong efforts were made to convey to the mind of the Secretary-at-War, by anonymous communications, an impression of the impropriety of the appointment he had received. In the beginning of 1817, the Secretary-at-War having indicated a disposition to recall his commission, Dr Thomson submitted to the Director-General the following statement:—"You are not ignorant what share of my time, since my return to Edinburgh, has been employed in official military medical duties; but I beg leave to state, for the information of the Secretary-at-War, that, in addition to these, in the winter session of 1815-16, I gave admission without fee to my lectures upon the Principles and Practice of Surgery to 18 medical officers belonging to the army, and to 62 medical officers belonging to the navy; and that in the summer session of 1816, I delivered, without fee, a course of lectures on Military Surgery, which was attended by 110 students, of whom 17 belonged to the army and 28 to the navy; and that this winter I have given out 51 gratis tickets for each of my courses of lec-

tures to medical officers of the army, and 53 to those of the navy. Further, you are aware that the depot hospital, which has been under my charge since March last, and the hospital of the 92d regiment at present in Edinburgh Castle, have been open to the medical officers of the army for the purpose of instruction under my superintendence; and that I have been, and am at present, employed during this winter in giving clinical lectures, on the cases admitted into these hospitals, to the medical officers attending there."

It was under such observation as is here adverted to, of gentlemen who had been engaged for longer or shorter periods in medical practice in the public service, that Dr Thomson conducted his trials, in the military hospital under his immediate charge, of the treatment of syphilis without mercury. On this subject he published a very short paper towards the latter end of 1817, in the shape of a letter to the late Dr Duncan, jun., and inserted by him in the 53d number of the Medical and Surgical Journal. In this paper he stated the circumstances which originally suggested to him this mode of treatment, among which he alluded particularly to the conversations he had had with Mr Pearson of the Lock Hospital. He described the beneficial effects which he found to result from the long-continued administration of the decoction of sarsaparilla in those cases which had been treated by mercury and in various forms of the disease; and he gave an account of the experimental trials which he was enabled to make in the most favourable circumstances of the military depot hospital of Edinburgh Castle, in which the patients were placed wholly under his control. He invariably followed the same modes of treatment in private practice, and was led, from his experience, to place the most entire confidence in the non-mercurial treatment of every form of the disease, whether primary or secondary; thus demonstrating that the employment of mercury as a specific was altogether unnecessary, and that the general principles of medical and surgical therapeutics were as applicable to this as to other diseases.

In the course of these inquiries, which excited considerable interest, and some opposition from those who regarded it as heterodox in medicine to doubt the specific efficacy of the mercurial

treatment, he received a letter from his friend Sir Astley Cooper, requesting information as to his practice; and his letter in reply contains a temperate and satisfactory refutation of the mis-statements in which some had indulged as to the ill success, and even hurtful effects, of the non-mercurial plan of treatment; together with a relation of the results he had obtained, which, to an unprejudiced mind, placed the advantages of the new plan of treatment beyond doubt. Of the truth of this, we receive the strongest confirmation in the revolution—as the change may fairly be called—which the employment of mercury in the treatment of syphilitic diseases has undergone in this country since it was first advocated and adopted by Dr Thomson.

We quote the last paragraph of Dr Thomson's letter to Sir Astley Cooper as a specimen, not only of the fulness of the evidence which he required as satisfactory in such an inquiry, but of the caution with which he deduced conclusions even from experimental trials which appeared complete and satisfactory.

“ This is all that at present occurs to me to say in answer to your letter; but as I know you love your profession, and desire above all things the discovery of truth in it, I am assured that you will think well of the trials of the non-mercurial practice which are being made in the military hospitals, under the superintendence of the most active, intelligent, and enlightened medical officer that has ever held the place of Director-General. Whether, from the investigation which has just been entered upon, it shall ultimately be found advisable to administer mercury for the cure of syphilis, and whether, in the event of the use of this medicine being found to be advisable, it will be better to employ it in the first or in the secondary stages of the disease, are, I conceive, legitimate subjects of inquiry, concerning which very little satisfactory information is to be found in the past records of our art. From the trials I have myself made, and seen others make, I am fully satisfied that not a single individual has hitherto been injured, and that, on the contrary, many, particularly persons of scrofulous constitutions, have been saved much evil, by abstaining, during the treatment of syphilitic complaints, from the use of mercury. Be assured that if I should ever see anything contrary to this in practice, I shall feel myself bound



in honour and duty to state it, not only to my private friends, but to the public ; and I think I may do this the more readily, that I never pledged myself for anything besides the accuracy of the statements which, in order to attract attention to the subject, and to secure my share of a claim to which I conceive myself entitled, I was induced to make public."

Dr Thomson had returned from the Continent in 1814, strongly impressed with the advantage, both to the sick and diseased poor, and to the medical school in Edinburgh, which might arise from the establishment in that city of an efficiently-conducted dispensary. This led to the institution of the present New Town Dispensary, which, at its commencement, met with a vehemence of opposition, of which, at the present day, it is difficult to form any conception. The gentlemen engaged in the design found it necessary to lay before the public a detailed statement of facts, which, if we mistake not, was chiefly prepared by Dr Thomson. The simple fact, that the number of patients admitted to the benefits of this institution, from its first establishment in September 1815 to 31st December 1844, was 229,020, of whom the number visited at their own houses was 97,819, contains the best practical refutation of the allegation then strenuously urged of its being unnecessary ; and nothing, certainly, has since occurred in the history of the other charitable medical institutions of Edinburgh to justify the apprehension then so loudly expressed, of its being calculated to be prejudicial to them. We scarcely think we are attributing too much to the influence of Dr Thomson's example upon the gentlemen with whom he was associated in this measure, when we say that, had not his professional zeal been equalled by his moral courage, the New Town Dispensary would have been strangled at its birth.

In 1818, another occasion occurred for testing his moral courage in the cause of humanity. In the course of the previous year, principally through the instrumentality of his friend and former pupil, Dr Gordon, an inquiry was set on foot as to certain defects in the economical treatment of the patients in the Royal Infirmary. This inquiry gave great offence to the managers, a very influential portion of the community, and to

their friends. Previously to the meeting of the Court of Contributors at which the Report of the Committee of Inquiry was to be considered, Dr Thomson drew up and published, in the form of a letter to the Court of Contributors, a summary of the results of the investigation. At the meeting, the managers' party mustered in overpowering numbers. Whoever attempted to speak on the opposite side was overpowered by clamour; whilst a very high functionary was listened to in a lengthened oration, in which he censured, in no measured terms, the conduct of those who had been in any way instrumental in the inquiry; and particularly vituperated the author of the letter to the Court of Contributors. When the meeting, at which Dr Thomson had not been present, was over, a general feeling prevailed that this speech had not been met as it should have been; and deeply participating in this feeling, Dr Thomson set about the preparation of a second letter to the Court of Contributors, in which he went into a full examination of the arguments by which the honourable manager had endeavoured to set aside the Report of the Committee, and the recorded evidence on which it was founded. These two letters appeared without his name. In the "Advertisement" to the second letter, he says, "The author of the following letter is fully aware of the well-founded prejudice which exists with regard to anonymous publications, and his name certainly should not have been withheld could he imagine it would have added any weight to that side of the question respecting the late inquiry into the state of the Royal Infirmary, which he has felt himself compelled, by an imperious sense of duty, to adopt. But in delivering his opinions with the freedom which the nature of the subject seemed to him to require, he is conscious that he has endeavoured to avoid everything which might give offence to those connected with the management of that institution; and he trusts that he has in no respect expressed himself differently from what he would have done had he judged it proper to subscribe his name to this or to his former letter." But though appearing anonymously, it is believed that the source from which these letters proceeded was very generally understood. What share they may have had in strengthening prejudices which led in a few years afterwards, as

we shall presently see, to Dr Thomson's exclusion from the place in the University to which the voice and the interests of the public loudly called him, it would perhaps be vain to conjecture. It is extremely gratifying, however, to know, that not only have the greater part, if not, indeed, the whole of the economical arrangements recommended by the Committee of Inquiry, and enforced by Dr Thomson in his two letters, been since adopted in the Royal Infirmary, but that changes pointed out by them in the constitution of the management have been introduced, which, by placing that management more under public control, have secured for the institution a much larger share of public support than it had ever previously received.

In the course of 1817-18 commenced an epidemic of small-pox in Edinburgh and other parts of Scotland, which for a succession of years engaged a large share of Dr Thomson's attention, compelling him to abandon the pleasing conviction he had up to that time entertained of cow-pock being an absolute preventative of small-pox, though it left him fully convinced of its possessing extraordinary powers in modifying the severity of that disease when occurring in persons previously vaccinated; and leading him to the persuasion that the distinction between small-pox and chicken-pox, established by Heberden, and since generally admitted, is erroneous.

The results of much personal observation of the disease, and of much reading, were communicated to the public in two volumes, viz., the "Account of the Varioloid Epidemic," &c., published in 1820, and in his "Historical Sketch," &c., published in 1822.

The opponents of vaccination had, from an early period of the practice, brought forward examples of what they regarded as the occurrence of small-pox subsequent to cow-pock; and represented this as an overwhelming objection to placing confidence in that practice as a preventative of small-pox. The champions of vaccination, on the other hand, had denied that such an objection could be brought against the practice; alleging that what had been represented as cases of small-pox, occurring subsequently to vaccination, were actually cases of chicken-pox, and not of small-pox. By degrees, however, they were



at length constrained to acknowledge the reality of this occurrence; and these reluctant acknowledgments tended to lead both themselves and the public into the persuasion that, as the opponents of vaccination had proved correct as to their facts, so also they were correct as to their inferences, and that the practice of vaccination was not deserving of the confidence it had acquired as a preventative of small-pox.

It was, we think, in a very considerable degree, if not mainly by Dr Thomson's labours that the profession and the public escaped from falling into what would, practically, have been a most unfortunate error. These labours clearly established that what was happening in the case of cow-pox, had previously happened in the case of small-pox, whether natural or inoculated; that is to say, that the persons who had passed through one attack of that disease had been liable to one if not more subsequent attacks of the same disease; just as those who had passed through cow-pox were now found to be liable to a subsequent attack of small-pox; but that, though in neither case is there absolute exemption from the occurrence of small-pox, the general rule is, that the secondary attack of small-pox in the one case, and the attack of small-pox after vaccination in the other case, is greatly milder than a primary attack of small-pox; and his personal observations even led to a conclusion far more favourable to vaccination than could *à priori* have been anticipated, viz., that small-pox occurring in those who have previously passed through cow-pox is, on the whole, a much milder disease than small-pox occurring in those who have previously passed through small-pox.

In the concluding part of his historical sketch, written at a late period of 1821, Dr Thomson mentions that, since June 1818, 836 cases of the varioloid epidemic had come under his observation. "Of the whole number, 281 have occurred in individuals who had neither had small-pox nor cow-pox, and of these fully more than one in four have died; 71 had previously passed through small-pox, and of these two have died; and 484 had undergone the process of vaccination, and of this number one only has died, results which evince," he observes, "beyond the power of cavil, the beneficial effects of vaccination in pro-

tecting the human constitution from the dangers of small-pox, and the great advantages which must ultimately arise from the universal adoption of this practice."

In finding himself compelled to admit that some of the small-pox-like, or varioloid, cases which occur after vaccination actually proceed from small-pox contagion, and cannot be got rid of, as he and other advocates of vaccination had been wont to suppose, on the plea of their being cases of chicken-pox, Dr Thomson was naturally led to inquire how it had happened that he and others had failed to recognise their true small-pox nature, and had set them down as cases of chicken-pox; and the conclusion at which he arrived was, that there was a fundamental error in Dr Heberden's recognition of chicken-pox as a disease distinct from small-pox, and that, in point of fact, what had been established as a generically or specifically distinct disease, is only one of the many varieties which small-pox, as it occurs under various modifying influences, is liable to exhibit in its external characters. It is not the purpose of this memoir to discuss or to vindicate the correctness of Dr Thomson's medical opinions, but, we believe, we may safely say, that the number of believers in the separate and independent existence of chicken-pox as a distinct disease from small-pox is already very much reduced, and that, under the progress of time and observation, it is likely to become still more diminished, if not entirely to disappear.

The labour which Dr Thomson went through in the prosecution of this inquiry, the almost entire possession which it took of his mind for a long period of time, can be conceived only by those who were witnesses of it. Any subject which offered a prospect of extending the boundaries of medical knowledge was sufficient to engage the attention of a mind so ardent as his; but the interest and importance of vindicating in the right manner the advantages of so great a boon to mankind as vaccination were calculated to call into operation all his energies. He dedicated with great satisfaction the two volumes to Sir James M'Grigor, Director-General of the Army Medical Department, to whom he felt himself attached by obligations of which he could make no other acknowledgment besides that of

cherishing them, as he did to the last hour of his life, in the most grateful remembrance.

In connection with the subject of cow-pox and small-pox, it is proper here to notice a short letter from Dr Thomson to the late Dr Duncan, which appeared in the 21st volume of the *Medical and Surgical Journal* (p. 92), in which he suggests, that the well-known test-pock of Mr Bryce bears the same relation to the primary cow-pox which secondary small-pox bear to primary small-pox ; that cow-pox modify cow-pox as small-pox modify small-pox ; and these diseases produce each a diminutive or spurious pock in being reciprocally modified by one another ; and that if medical men, previously to the introduction of vaccination, gave the name of varicella to varioloid eruptions, many of which we have reason to believe were cases of secondary small-pox, we may now, with equal propriety, give the name of vaccinella to secondary cow-pox. These analogies, he adds, between small-pox and cow-pox, are as curious in a speculative as they are important in a practical point of view.

In the summer of 1819, Dr Thomson delivered a course of lectures on the diseases of the eye, partly systematic and partly what is usually, though inaccurately, termed clinical,—the patients affected with eye diseases who applied for advice at the New Town Dispensary being transferred to his class-room, and other means being used for bringing together illustrative cases. In Edinburgh, at that time, there did not exist any separate institution for the treatment of this class of diseases, and no separate course of lectures for its consideration had been previously delivered. Dr Thomson's inducement to undertake this course was, it is believed, his desire and hope that it should be continued by his pupil and esteemed friend, Dr Tweedie, whose early removal to London frustrated this expectation. There can be no doubt, however, that this course paved the way to the institution, five years later (1824), of the first Eye Dispensary, as well as at a subsequent period (1834) to that of the Eye Infirmary in Edinburgh, the senior surgeon of which (Dr Watson) always referred to the course of lectures delivered by Dr Thomson in the summer of 1819, as having first directed his attention in a special manner to this department of practice, in which



he justly attained considerable eminence. Dr Thomson had, throughout his whole professional career, bestowed much study and attention on the diseases of the eye, and seems at more than one period to have entertained serious thoughts of selecting them as a special department of practice. Among his correspondence is found a letter from Dr De Carro, well known as an early promoter of the practice of vaccination upon the Continent, and who was then resident in Vienna, giving an account of the celebrated living oculists of that capital, and advising his friend in what way he would be able to derive the largest amount of benefit from their instructions; and, in letters written by himself from London in 1803, he repeatedly speaks of the diseases of the eye as being likely to be the first professional subject on which he would venture to appear before the public as an author.

Dr Thomson was now comparatively little engaged in the practice of surgery, and that only in the way of consultation, and had become desirous to transfer his energies as a teacher to a new field. His connection with the University, however, so long as it continued, debarred him from delivering any course that could be considered in the light of competition with any of those delivered by his colleagues. The history and treatment of organic diseases was a department of medical science which his habits of pathological investigation had especially prepared him to teach; and though attendance upon a special course of this kind was not required by any of the public boards, on the part of candidates for their licences, he hoped to be able to render such a course attractive, particularly by extending in it a practice he had pursued to a considerable extent in his course of surgery, that, namely, of illustrating the various diseased appearances of the different organs of the body by coloured delineations. With this view he secured the services of Mr, afterwards Dr and Sir Robert Carswell, whose singular talents for the representation of morbid structure have since been so advantageously manifested, not only in the large collections of drawings which he executed successively for Dr Thomson and for the University College in London, but in his published "*Illustrations of the Elementary Forms of Disease.*"

The benefits that might result from the application of coloured delineations to the representation of diseases, were fully pointed out by Professor Delins in his "*Meditatio de Iconibus Pathologico-Anatomicis ad Naturam pictis*," published at Erlangen in 1782. But though, in some particular departments, and especially in the illustration of the diseases of the eye and of the skin, advantage had been taken of this mode of representation, the idea of applying it, in a systematic course, to the elucidation of the whole range of diseases, does not seem ever to have been entertained by any teacher previously to the bold conception of Dr Thomson. It is scarcely necessary to remark what important benefits have resulted to pathological science from his engagement of Dr Carswell in this design. Had it had no other consequence besides that of training Dr Carswell himself to an intimate acquaintance with morbid anatomy, to the promotion of which his personal observations and labours have furnished very large and important contributions, it would have conferred a most valuable service. But when we look to the numerous works on morbid anatomy, illustrated by coloured delineations, which have since appeared, and consider how much both the preparation and the publication of these works have tended to the promotion of pathology, we cannot fail to regard this as another instance, in addition to the many which Dr Thomson's history affords, of the beneficial effects resulting to science from a new direction being given to the labours of its cultivators, by an impulse from a judicious and intelligent mind.

Dr Thomson's collection of pathological delineations, begun before 1820, was greatly extended between the years 1822 and 1826, when Mr Carswell was entirely occupied in its formation in this country, and in various hospitals and museums on the Continent, to which he was sent by Dr Thomson. It was first employed in illustration of Dr Thomson's Lectures on the Practice of Physic. At a later period it underwent a greater increase, when it was adapted to the illustration of the courses of General Pathology in the University of Edinburgh; so that at last the number of delineations amounted to about 2400. Of this number, more than a half consisted of original finished

paintings, chiefly in water colour, of the morbid appearances observed in different cases of disease, many of which were of a most rare and interesting kind. It may be proper here to state further, that this unrivalled collection of pictorial illustrations of pathological subjects was afterwards employed by Dr William Thomson for the illustration of his Lectures on the Practice of Physic in the University of Glasgow, and that after his death it passed into the possession of the University of Edinburgh, in connection with the Practice of Physic Chair.

In the year 1821, Dr Gregory died, and Dr Thomson, along with many others, offered himself as a candidate for the vacant chair of the Practice of Physic in the University. In that application he was most nobly supported. His early instructors, his fellow-students, his pupils, his professional brethren, all combined in furnishing a body of testimony in his favour which left the Town-Council,—who were patrons of the chair,—no room for difficulty. “Most of these,” said Dr Thomson himself, in transmitting a portion of his testimonials to the patrons, “are from individuals who have themselves been employed in teaching branches of medical science; and all of them from men of such worth and eminence, that, as it is my highest pride to have obtained their good opinion, so it shall be the study of my life to endeavour to justify it.”

In laying before the reader a single specimen of these professional testimonials, we might perhaps present it under a name of more extended and imposing authority than attaches to the one we shall select,—that of the late Dr Kellie of Leith; but certainly not under that of one more capable of estimating the qualifications of a colleague than Dr Kellie was, in the judgment of those who knew him most intimately, and no one knew him better than Dr Thomson, or valued more highly those talents and attainments which only needed a wider field of exertion to have raised their possessor to a position of the first rank in his profession.

“Your printed testimonials, which you have done me the honour to send me, are indeed most ample and respectable; but you have lived so long amongst us, and have been so long and so eminently distinguished for all those accomplishments



which the vacant chair of our medical school demands, that I should have thought such a mass of testimonials little wanted to substantiate your claims." "A physician of mere *practical experience*, and one of mere *science* and *research* would be equally unfit to discharge the important duties of professor of medicine in our *alma mater*. You, in an eminent degree, unite the qualifications of *both*. With great talents, joined to unrivalled industry, you have established for yourself abroad, as well as at home, a distinguished reputation as a man of literature and of science, and have become equally eminent as a writer, a teacher, and a practitioner of medicine. As I know few men who have better deserved this high fame, so surely I know no one who has made greater sacrifice to merit and obtain it."

Nor was the evidence borne in his favour confined exclusively to members of the profession; and one non-medical testimony to Dr Thomson's high qualifications we cannot deny ourselves the pleasure of introducing here—prompted not more by the singularly truthful and eloquent exposition of his scientific character it affords, than by our knowledge of the value he attached to the long and steady friendship which it records. "It is now, I think," says Mr Thomas Thomson, to whose labours all interested in the constitutional history of Scotland are under perpetual obligations, "more than thirty years since I first had the good fortune to make your acquaintance, when we were attending the chemical lectures in Glasgow College; and I can distinctly remember the high opinion we all then formed of your scientific talents, as well as of your zeal in the acquisition of knowledge. That acquaintance laid the foundation of a friendship which has ever since subsisted between us; and which, while it has certainly afforded me ample opportunity of estimating your character in riper years, may probably be thought to have disabled me from judging impartially in anything where your interests or your fame are nearly concerned. At the same time, I am confident that I shall not offend against the conviction of any of those to whom you have been best known, in stating, that from the period when you first entered on the career of science, down to the present day, throughout a life devoted to the laborious and anxious duties of your profession,

your original ardour in the pursuit of knowledge has never suffered the slightest abatement, but has carried you onward in an uninterrupted progress of discipline and of acquirement, which constitute at once the highest title and the best qualification for the important and honourable office to which you are now aspiring."

It soon, however, became apparent that other considerations than the qualifications of the candidates, or the reputation and welfare of the University, were to determine the choice. As the day of election approached, representations were made to the Duke of York of the individual injustice and public injury that were threatened by the disregard of Dr Thomson's claims. Upon this his Royal Highness addressed to the Lord Provost a letter, in which, to a strong representation of the opinion entertained of Dr Thomson's character and services in the army, he subjoined the expression of his own best wishes for Dr Thomson's success. This communication unfortunately arrived a few days too late. The majority of the Council, at a previous meeting, had committed themselves as to the course they were to pursue, to such a degree as to render it impossible for them to draw back. There can be no doubt, however, that this letter produced a very startling impression upon them; and with a view to counter-balance its effect, and to justify the conduct of the Town-Council in His Royal Highness' eyes, a declaration of the high qualifications of the gentleman on whom the chair was to be conferred was obtained from several of the members of the Medical Faculty in the University,—a declaration which tended greatly to destroy the confidence which patrons of University chairs might repose in the judgments of academic colleagues.

Early in the competition for the Practice of Physic Chair, Dr Thomson resigned the chair of Surgery, which he had held for seventeen years from the College of Surgeons, and had the double gratification of receiving the warm thanks of that body for the manner in which he had discharged the duties of his office, and of seeing elected as his successor in that office his former pupil, and latterly assistant as well as friend, Mr Turner. In the course of the following summer, his services as surgeon to the forces having been discontinued in consequence of reductions in

the military establishments of the country, he resigned his appointment as Professor of Military Surgery in the University, thereby freeing himself from any restrictions as a teacher ; and accordingly, in the subsequent winter session, he delivered, as an extra-academical lecturer, a course upon the practice of physic.

In entering on this course he at once put aside that arrangement of diseases which nosologists had adopted, in their desire to imitate the classifications of naturalists, and to secure to medicine the benefits which these classifications had conferred on the several departments of natural history. In its place he substituted an anatomico-physiological arrangement, as the one best adapted for lectures or for treatises on the practice of physic, inasmuch as it brings together, in the first place, the different diseases of the same organ, and, in the second place, those of the organs most intimately related to one another. The expediency of this change has received the best sanction which it could have obtained, in the rapidity with which it has been almost universally followed by other teachers of the same department of medicine in this country.

Our limits do not admit of entering into any exposition of the character of this course generally, or of the topics discussed in it, and the manner in which they were treated. We may observe, however, that the view which Dr Thomson presented of the diseases of the respiratory and circulatory organs, in particular, embracing as it did the most recent researches of Continental as well as domestic pathologists, and more especially those of M. Laennec, which had been published two or three years before, was probably fuller and more systematic than had ever previously been exhibited in a course on the practice of physic. And illustrated, as it was, by coloured representations of almost all the morbid alterations of structure to which these organs are subject, it could not fail to give his students a deep interest in these two classes of diseases, and to urge them to a more accurate investigation of the many circumstances in their natural history which he pointed out as being still imperfectly understood.

The greater part of these lectures were composed immediately previously to their delivery ; and it may convey to the reader



some idea of Dr Thomson's energy, copiousness of knowledge, and systematic arrangement of his ideas, to learn that very many of the lectures were dictated nearly fully to an amanuensis on the morning of the day on which each one was delivered, while he was in bed, and this at a period when he was so much engaged in practice, that no other time could be found free from interruption. He was then in the habit of reading in his carriage as he went during the day to his different professional visits, and of studying in the evening in his extensive and well-chosen library. He retired to bed generally about ten o'clock, and by three or four in the morning he was again at work, digesting and preparing the materials which, between the hours of six and nine, he dictated in the form of lectures to the amanuensis.

Among those who, in addition to his sons, acted in this capacity for Dr Thomson at various times, and all of whom he made his companions in study, may be mentioned the names of Mr Gray, surgeon, of Kinross; Dr Donald Mackintosh, who died in 1827; Dr (afterwards Professor) Ferdinand Becker, of Berlin, who died in 1836; and Professor J. Y. Simpson, of the University of Edinburgh.

It has been erroneously said, that Dr Thomson treated the stethoscope, on its first introduction, with ridicule. So far from this being the case, he took infinite pains, in his lectures on the two classes of diseases that have been mentioned, to make his students acquainted, as far as can be done in a merely systematic course, with the various acoustic phenomena which the practice of auscultation reveals, and with the inferences to which the occurrence of these phenomena in particular cases leads, so far as the then existing state of knowledge admitted of such inferences being deduced; and he urged upon them the propriety of making themselves practically familiar with these phenomena as they occur both in health and disease. It was in respect of the risk of being led by an over-implicit reliance on auscultatory phenomena, to set down as cases of organic disease of the heart what are really only cases of functional disturbance of that organ, that Dr Thomson principally cautioned his students against an imprudent confidence in drawing inferences from stethoscopic

signs ; and no impartial person who reviews the progress of knowledge in this department, since the time when the first edition of M. Laennec's work was published, can fail to acknowledge, that, in the doubts which Dr Thomson expressed as to the sufficiency of the knowledge that had then been acquired, for effecting the discrimination of the diseases dependent on organic alteration from those of a simply functional or dynamical character, he only afforded an illustration of his usual sagacity, and of his practical acquaintance with both classes of diseases.

What Dr Thomson may perchance have been tempted to say on some particular occasion, in bantering a stethoscopic enthusiast, must not be construed to the precise letter, any more than his off-hand profession that the practice of the homœopathists differed from that which he followed, chiefly in this respect, that while they gave very little medicine, he gave none at all. His sentiments as to the employment of medicines as remedial agents in the treatment of diseases, on which also there seems to be some misconception, may be best learned from the following observations with which he was accustomed to conclude his course on the practice of physic.

“ I am aware that, on looking back on the remedial part of the treatment of most diseases, there are two points in which my course may appear to some of you to have been defective. The first is, the small number and great similarity of the remedies which I have usually recommended in the treatment of diseases ; and the second is, the entire omission of the mention of many of those remedies which you will find strongly recommended in your books on materia medica, and which are even still much used by many respectable practitioners.

“ Respecting these points, all I can say is, that I have been chiefly desirous to make you acquainted with the general facts or principles which appear to me to have been ascertained with regard to the antiphlogistic plan of curing diseases ; and, at the same time, with some of those salutary changes which nature, aided by diet and regimen, often accomplishes, but which are usually ascribed by the ignorant to the operation of the medicines that have been administered during the time that

those natural and salutary changes, by which diseases are, in fact, ultimately cured or relieved, have been going on in the constitution.

“ With regard to the *small number* of remedies which I have recommended for the cure of diseases, I have to observe, that though it be certainly very desirable that we should have in our possession a sufficient store of remedies, and some room for choice in their adaptation to different constitutions, even in the treatment of the same diseases, yet I cannot but regard the infinite number of remedies with which the *Materia Medica* is incumbered as one of the greatest evils to which the practice of physic is at present exposed. The endless number of these remedies, and the variety of powers which each of them is supposed to possess, renders the study of the *materia medica* painfully and uselessly laborious, the choice of remedies perplexing, and the consideration of their results doubtful and unsatisfactory. There is certainly no mechanical art in which a man could be expected to acquire much skill in the application, or in the knowledge of the comparative effects, of different instruments, were he obliged to employ, in the exercise of his profession, instruments as numerous as the remedies are which it is deemed necessary that the medical practitioner should employ in the exercise of his art.

“ In no department of the healing art is a greater reform, in my opinion, necessary than in the *Materia Medica*. But from the number and strength of the prejudices and interests with which this reform has to contend, I fear that it will be long,—that it will be ages,—before it can be accomplished. We must hope, however,—and by our exertions endeavour to promote it,—that in the progress of the healing art, the articles of which our *materia medica* consists shall be such only as are universally acknowledged to have the sanative powers ascribed to them; and that these powers shall be such as to produce *sensible* effects, in the same way as those remedies which we at present include under the general terms of Cathartics, Diuretics, Diaphoretics, &c., and not of the kind which have been so long included under the indefinite and deceitful terms of Tonics, Alteratives, and Specifics.”



In 1824, it having been rumoured that proposals were under the consideration of the Senatus Academicus of the University, for improving and extending the curriculum of study required of candidates for the medical degree, Dr Thomson, under the designation of a Graduate of King's College, Aberdeen, addressed to the Patrons and Professors a few remarks which he entitled, "Hints respecting the Improvement of the Literary and Scientific Education of Candidates for the degree of M.D." &c. In 1826, on the appointment of a Royal Commission for visiting the Universities of Scotland, he prefixed to these Hints, "Observations on the Preparatory Education of Candidates for the degree of M.D. in the Scottish Universities," and addressed the whole to the Royal Commissioners in his own name. He subsequently printed "Additional Hints respecting the Improvement of the System of Medical Instruction followed in the University of Edinburgh," the object of which was to call attention to two great defects, as he conceived, in that system,—the want of separate professors of surgery and clinical medicine.

In consequence, probably, of these publications, Dr Thomson received notice that he was to be summoned before the Commissioners for examination; and a considerable interval having elapsed between the time of notice and his being called to give evidence, he had an opportunity of extending into short essays on each topic the heads on which he at first proposed to offer remarks *viva voce*. These remarks are to be found in the printed "Evidence" which accompanied the Report of the Royal Commission. Besides impressing on the Royal Commissioners his views as to the improvements desirable in the preparatory education of medical students, which he regarded as of incomparable importance, and in the modes of teaching surgery and clinical medicine, he suggested to them the expediency of making General Pathology, then taught as a department of the Institutes of Medicine, the subject of a separate course of lectures.

In the first volume of his Life of Cullen, Dr Thomson afterwards inserted a statement of his general views on medical education; and it merits notice, that in recent legislation upon this subject, a near approach has been made to some of the

most important suggestions thrown out by Dr Thomson in the publications above referred to.

In the course of 1827, Dr Thomson published an edition, in two volumes 8vo, of Dr Cullen's Works, containing the Physiology, Nosology, and First Lines of the Practice of Physic, with numerous extracts from Dr Cullen's MS. papers, and from his treatise of the *Materia Medica*. "In preparing it for the press," he observed, in a dedicatory address to the students of the Medical School of Edinburgh, "I have had two objects chiefly in view; first, to furnish you with such extracts from Dr Cullen's MS. papers as seem to throw additional light on the subjects of which these books treat; and, secondly, to put the public in possession of documents that appear to me to establish Dr Cullen's claims to originality for observations and doctrines which, under various modifications, have been repeatedly brought forward since his time, and made the bases of new theories or systems of medicine." And, again, "In presenting you," says he, "with these elementary works in their present form, I am well aware that the science of medicine has made great advances since they were first produced; advances which require corresponding changes in the manner in which this science should now be taught. But I know of no general work on the practice of physic, hitherto published in this country, calculated to supersede Dr Cullen's writings as textbooks; and certainly none which can bear a comparison with them in the extent and variety of the medical information which they contain; in the model which they afford of distinct and comprehensive definitions and histories of diseases; and in the talent which they display for the accurate discrimination and simple generalization of the results of experience."

In this, as in all the other works published by Dr Thomson, he entirely neglected pecuniary considerations. They were all a cause of expenditure, rather than a source of emolument to him. It can scarcely be doubted that if, at the period at which we are now arrived, he had published a treatise on the Practice of Medicine, embodying the more modern information contained in his lectures, he would have satisfied a great demand which existed for such a

work, with much advantage and accession of reputation to himself. But he preferred doing justice to Cullen's reputation, by the publication of the edition of his works, with the addition of extracts from his manuscripts which had come into his possession.

During the sessions 1828-29 and 1829-30, Dr Thomson delivered his course on the Practice of Physic in conjunction with his elder son, after which he transferred it wholly to his son, with no expectation of again resuming the duties of a teacher. In discontinuing this course, he probably felt that the motives which had prompted him to commence it, had now, in a great measure, ceased to operate. One of these, his desire, by teaching, to augment his own knowledge, he had in a very considerable degree removed, by making himself acquainted, so far as his very extensive and laborious business would permit, with the latest and best writings upon special pathology. He had established a greatly improved method of teaching this important department of medical education upon a solid foundation; and he might well feel, also, that he had amply justified the favourable opinions of his qualifications for teaching it that had been expressed by his friends in reference to his application for the chair in the University.

In the course of the autumn of 1830, he indulged himself with the recreation of a tour through a large portion of England, accompanied by his younger son, chiefly for the inspection of asylums for the reception of the insane; a class of institutions which he lost no opportunity of visiting. On his way homewards he paid a visit to Dublin and Belfast.

In 1831, Dr Thomson addressed to Lord Melbourne, then secretary of state for the home department, a memorial representing the advantages to medical education likely to flow from the establishment of a separate chair of General Pathology. The result was the issuing of a commission in his favour, conceived in terms which inferred that the course of pathology should be added to the curriculum of study required by the University of its medical graduates. A similar commission was at the same time issued in favour of his friend Mr Turner, to be the first distinct Professor of Surgery in the University. From the latter appointment, Dr Thomson derived even more gratifica-



tion than from that in which he was himself concerned,—not less on public grounds than on account of the acknowledgment it implied of the high qualifications of one with whom, after having seen him educated to the profession under his immediate superintendence, he had, for upwards of twenty years, lived upon habits of the most intimate and confidential friendship.

The creation of the Pathology Chair gave rise at the time, and on several subsequent occasions, to much discussion. Dr Thomson defended the utility of the measure, first, in a letter to the College Bailie, of date 29th October 1831; and a second time in 1837, in Remarks on the Memorial of the Town Council to Lord John Russell, &c., respecting the professorship of medicine and general pathology.

It is unnecessary now to enter upon the discussion of the propriety of the establishment of a chair of general pathology in the University of Edinburgh, as the experience of a quarter of a century has fully shown how correctly Dr Thomson estimated the future progress of medical science in recommending that measure; and there are at the present day few large medical schools in the country in which general pathology or pathological anatomy does not form a distinct and regular course of instruction. It may be proper, however, to state in this place, very shortly, the reasons which led Dr Thomson first to propose, and to the last to defend through all opposition, the institution of the chair.

The department of General Pathology originally formed a branch of the course of the Theory or Institutes of medicine, along with Physiology and General Therapeutics. But the progress of the knowledge of the structure and functions of the human body in a state of health had rendered physiology so extensive a subject as to demand the whole of the time allotted for one course of lectures, and to absorb the whole of the attention of a teacher, who should at the same time be an earnest cultivator of his department of science. It had thus become apparent, that either a distinct professorship of general pathology was required, or a separate course of lectures on that subject by the professor of the institutes had become necessary. The latter expedient had accordingly been for some time resorted to in the Edinburgh School of Medicine.

In almost all the Continental universities, however, General Pathology had been recognised as a separate course, and was taught in many by a distinct professor. More especially, the very great advances made during the first quarter of the present century in the department of pathological anatomy,—a continually growing science, requiring peculiar and special means of illustration and instruction,—seemed to render it inexpedient that so important a body of doctrine as that which treated of the general nature, causes, and effects of disease, should be included in the same course with the equally or more extensive subject of physiology. It had, indeed, become obvious to the majority of the most enlightened persons in the profession, that no full or satisfactory account of two such comprehensive and different departments could be communicated to students by the same teacher; and that the investigation of both could scarcely be undertaken even by the most highly gifted individual with advantage. It was not to be wondered at, then, that, in the proposal for the establishment of the new chair, Dr Thomson met with the approval and sympathy of all those members of the profession who felt an earnest desire to extend the boundaries of medical science, and who were of opinion that the formation of the new professorship would tend to the improvement of the education of those obtaining the medical degree at the University.

These arguments have continued to gain force with the advance of knowledge of the several departments in the present day, and we trust that in any changes which hereafter may be introduced in the amount of the qualifications for the medical degree, it may not be considered expedient to attempt to lessen the alleged burdens upon the medical student, by the removal from the curriculum of the subject of instruction which, from its presenting the phenomena of disease to him in their most generalized and scientific aspect, has the greatest effect, next to the study of physiology, in improving the powers of mind of the student, and elevating the scientific character of the medical profession.

Soon after his appointment as Professor of General Pathology, Dr Thomson published the first volume of the *Life of Cullen*, a work in which he had been long engaged, but

which had been greatly retarded, partly by his numerous engagements, partly by his great fastidiousness as to what is required in a work to be presented to the public, and by his apprehension of falling short of what was due to the memory of one, of whose scientific character he had formed a very high estimate.

In the winter session of 1832-33, he delivered his first course of lectures on general pathology. Although Dr Thomson's previous courses of lectures on the practice of medicine must have brought under his review a considerable part of the facts and doctrines which fall to be treated of in a course of general pathology, and although he had in those courses given especial attention to the organic changes occasioned by disease, yet we cannot but be struck with the energy which enabled him at the age of sixty-seven, when most men are contented to rest satisfied with previously acquired knowledge, to embark on an extensive range of new inquiries, necessitating a vast amount of varied reading, and much reflection and collation. His mind was not one which could be contented with imperfect information in any subject, much less in that which formed the special object of his inquiry, and accordingly we find him at this period engaged in collecting materials from all sources for maturing his views of the general nature and causes of diseases. In this labour he was much assisted by his eldest son, whose education he had carefully directed into this channel, in the hope that he might succeed him afterwards in the chair, an office for which Dr William Thomson possessed many and peculiar qualifications.

The printed syllabus of the course, which was, soon after its commencement, jointly prepared by them, sufficiently attests the extent and importance of the subjects to be taught, the erudition necessary for their treatment, and the labour and judgment required on the part of the professor who should succeed in conveying to his students a consistent view of the doctrines of general pathology.

In the succeeding autumn, Dr Thomson again made a Continental tour with his younger son. On this occasion they proceeded through the Low Countries up the Rhine, visiting some of



the German universities; then through Switzerland to the north of Italy, and by Turin, Milan, Bologna, Florence, and Rome, to Naples; thence they returned by sea to Marseilles, and visited successively Montpellier, Lyons, and Paris. This extensive tour was performed in less than three months, and every place visited was seen in a very thorough manner. He was accustomed, on his return, when asked how long he had been at any particular town, to reply, "Don't ask me how long I was there, but what I saw." His visit to the Italian schools of medicine derived great additional interest from his having been for some time previously engaged in the study of the works of the Italian pathologists, in reference to their bearing on pathology generally, and on the doctrines of Brown in particular, which it was his intention to discuss fully in the second volume of the *Life of Cullen*.

In the summer of 1835, in consequence of repeated attacks and long continuance of illness, Dr Thomson formally announced to his professional brethren his resolution to decline in future attendance on patients at their own houses, and to confine himself exclusively to such consultation practice as could be pursued at his own residence. This measure he adopted in the hope that he would thereby be enabled to go on with his course on general pathology. At the beginning of the winter, he experienced a severe blow in the death of Mr Turner; and in the succeeding spring, he was again seized with illness, which greatly reduced his strength, and by the approach of the following winter he found it necessary to obtain the consent of the patrons to the delegation of his University duty. With the exception of some occasional lectures, delivered in subsequent sessions, his labours as a teacher now terminated, the course being conducted by deputy up to the time of his resignation in 1841, and the appointment of a successor in 1842.\* In 1837, however, on a proposal, threatening to be fatal to the permanent existence of the Pathology Chair, on the part of the Town-Council, to which body, mainly on his recommendation, the patronage had been

\* Dr Craigie conducted one of these courses, Dr Simpson another, and Dr William Thomson the remaining ones.

transferred, he made his last visit to London for the purpose of defeating these efforts.

From the time of his quitting the practice of his profession, Dr Thomson resided principally at his villa, on the south side of Edinburgh, near the foot of Blackford Hill, making occasional visits, particularly for portions of the winter, to his sons. The purpose of the present notice, and the length to which it has already extended, equally preclude us from following him into his retreat. We may remark, however, that in retiring thither from the field of active life, Dr Thomson ran no risk of being the victim of that weariness which is so apt to make a prey of those who venture upon such an exchange. He was now at liberty to follow those pursuits in natural and mental science which were congenial to his tastes, without distraction or interruption from the laborious duties or harassing anxieties of his profession.

In the course of our narrative, we have had repeated occasion to refer to the interest which Dr Thomson took in studies, cognate, indeed, with medicine, but not absolutely appertaining to it. But into how many tracks, and how far, he pursued these studies, it has not been possible for us to indicate; nor is it at present in our power to supply the defect which belongs to this part of our picture of his intellectual character. "When I say that Dr Thomson is the most learned physician I ever met with," observed the late Dr Henry Davidson, who was perhaps himself better entitled to that character than any living competitor, "I know that I am quite safe from any appearance of exaggeration; because I have heard the same language employed by many medical men in England, and by all those foreigners with whom he became acquainted during his professional tours on the Continent. It is not only in medicine and its immediate branches that Dr Thomson has a most remarkable degree of knowledge. No one, I am certain, can have conversed with or consulted him upon the actual state or previous history of chemistry, botany, mathematics, or general philosophy, without been surprised at the extent and accuracy of his information; which can have been acquired only by a devotion of time and attention to laborious study, seldom found

and but little expected in an individual engaged, as Dr Thomson has been, in an anxious and fatiguing profession."

It is perfectly true that Dr Thomson's acquirements were the result of much assiduous application, superadded to the possession of large natural endowments. Few men, we believe, ever wasted less time than he did upon frivolous or unimproving occupations. Every morning, for a long period of his life, with the assistance of his flint and steel, he had lighted his candle, and was busy in the work of self-improvement during hours which most students think themselves entitled to devote to repose. And when professional avocations used to call him to the country, the quantity of reading he was able to get through upon the road communicated to these journeys an especial degree of enjoyment.

A circumstance of primary importance, as we conceive, in consolidating in his mind the extensive and varied information which he possessed, was his persuasion that knowledge is not to be seized by a sudden onset, but must be regularly approached through her portals. To whatever subject his studies were directed, therefore, his first concern was to make himself familiar with its elements. He had gained for himself a ready access to the knowledge contained in the writings of foreign authors, by the diligent cultivation of a considerable proportion of the European languages; and in French, Italian, and German, he had acquired such facility in correct and even elegant extempore translation, that when, in his lectures, he had occasion to read a passage from a book in one of these languages, it was not uncommon for his students to go away under the impression that he had been reading from a translation, and not from the original edition of the work he had quoted.

Another leading feature in his character as a student, was his intolerance of imperfect information, and the resolution with which, when, in the course of reading, a term occurred, or a fact was adverted to, of which his knowledge was deficient, he would, before allowing himself to proceed, seek to obtain, at whatever expense of time and labour, an explanation of the difficulty that had presented itself. From these two characteristics it arose, that not only were the shelves of his library along-



side his habitual chair, and the table beside his bed, loaded, but the pockets of his carriage were stuffed with Grammars, Elements, Manuals, and Dictionaries, of all descriptions, readily available for strengthening the foundations of his knowledge, and for aiding him in its extension.

Did space permit, abundant illustrations might readily be adduced to exhibit Dr Thomson as not less amiable in disposition than vigorous in intellect. Considering, indeed, that he was not in the exercise of any public patronage, the number of persons on whom, in the course of his life, he conferred essential obligations, and particularly the number of young men whom he was able effectively to advance in their career, prove the kindly interest which he took in the welfare of others, while it evinces the judgment with which he made his friendly offices bear upon their peculiar circumstances and qualifications. Acts of this description originated less frequently in applications addressed to him, than in the spontaneous suggestions of his own mind; for he was ever anxious to discover opportunities of rendering services to those whom he esteemed: and desirous to see placed, in situations of responsibility, the persons by whom their duties would be most efficiently discharged.

His own disposition to advance in the career of improvement, caused Dr Thomson to take especial pleasure in the society of the young. In him the author of any train of original investigation was sure to find a warm sympathiser; one ready to go over with him, and to authenticate his observations, to suggest additional modes of illustration, and to trace out any correlative facts that had been previously recorded.

From the wide range of his information, his readiness in bringing it to bear on the subject in hand, and the animation with which he was ever disposed to enter on the topic that might be uppermost in the thoughts of those who came in contact with him, Dr Thomson's conversation could not fail to be most improving. But it had also, in a singular degree, that quality which, more than any other perhaps, tends to render conversation agreeable, its being conducted, as nearly as possible, on the principle of intellectual equality between those engaged in it; never manifesting any intolerance of listening, nor dictated by

any love of display ; but indicative of a genuine desire to acquire as well as to convey information, so that the opposite party had the gratification of feeling, along with his consciousness of deriving, that he was also conveying improvement,—that the advantage was at all events not wholly upon one side, however unequally it might be divided.

We have already adverted to the great interest which Dr Thomson took in the prosperity of the Medical Society. The winter session after the publication of his *Lectures on Inflammation*, the Medical Society raised him to the rank of an honorary member ; and when it is considered that the list of those to whom this compliment had been paid for a succession of years previously to its being rendered to himself, presents, in unbroken line, the names of Jenner, Vauquelin, Cuvier, Abernethy, Davy, Werner, Pearson, Playfair, Berzelius, and Astley Cooper, it will be admitted that this honour, which the society always showed great judgment and scrupulousness in conferring, had, as it reached him, lost none of its value. Dr Thomson did not, till a late period, become a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians ; but soon after his joining that body, its members called upon him to accept, greatly out of the order of college seniority, the office of president. He was a fellow of the Royal Societies of London and Edinburgh, and of many other learned bodies in this country and on the Continent.

Dr Thomson was of a large and apparently robust frame of body ; but he had suffered from asthma and rheumatism to a considerable extent in middle life, so much so that these complaints more than once threatened to prevent his continuing in practice. In later life, they had in a great measure yielded to the careful regimen which he pursued, but they left his constitution somewhat enfeebled, or at all events, they had rendered him peculiarly liable to attacks of illness from exposure to cold. In the last years of his life the body seemed rather to suffer from the gradual loss of its nutritive powers than from any specific disease, and death appeared at last to be the effect of natural dissolution from advanced age. The mind remained, however, perfectly entire, and in his last moments, as is related of Haller, he watched with calmness, and indicated

to those around him the gradual extinction of the vital functions, and the encroachment of those signs so well known to him which marked the actual invasion of the fatal change. The features of Dr Thomson's face were strongly marked. In middle life his complexion was sallow, and his hair jet black, but in the last twenty years of his life a more ruddy complexion and a silvery whiteness of his hair, combined with the kindly smile, and the thoughtful and intelligent expression of his brown eyes, rendered his countenance peculiarly attractive and agreeable.

An excellent portrait of him, painted by Geddes, was presented to him in 1822 by the Medical Officers of the Army and Navy who had attended his lectures. From this painting a very correct engraving was published soon afterwards. A very characteristic marble bust, copied from one executed by Angus Fletcher about the year 1829, is placed in the hall of the Library of the University of Edinburgh.

Dr Thomson died at Morland Cottage, on the 11th October 1846, in the 82d year of his age.

Dr Thomson was twice married; first in 1798, to Margaret Crawford, second daughter of John Gordon, Esq. of Carroll in Sutherlandshire, who died early in 1804; and a second time, in 1806, to Margaret, third daughter of Professor John Millar, whose lectures on jurisprudence and government long shed much lustre upon the University of Glasgow. By his first marriage, Dr Thomson had three children. The eldest of these, John Gordon Thomson, died in the beginning of the winter of 1818, at the age of 19, when he had already given evidence of the possession of excellent abilities, and of a soundness of understanding rare at his period of life, embellished by uncommonly prepossessing manners. He was studying anatomy under the superintendence of the late Dr Gordon, who was desirous that he should be prepared as speedily as possible for taking his own place as a teacher of anatomy, an occupation in which a rapidly increasing practice warned him that it would be impossible for himself long to persevere. While the pupil was declining under the effects of a slow malady, the instructor was cut off by a sudden and rapid disease; and



within a few months Dr Thomson found himself deprived, as it were, of two sons.

His eldest daughter, who died in 1824, at the age of 23, had for a number of years been her father's companion in those scientific pursuits which constituted his relaxations from professional duties and studies, a part for which she was singularly well fitted by talents of a very high order, most sedulously cultivated by an education that comprehended almost every branch, not only of polite learning, but of general science, and accompanied by that entire freedom from display that disarms the censure even of those who are most jealous of female learning.

The survivor of Dr Thomson's first family, Dr William Thomson, was appointed Professor of Medicine in the University of Glasgow in 1841, and died in 1852. Of his family by his second marriage, two only outlived the age of childhood, both of whom still survive, a daughter and a son, the Editor of the present notice.

The foregoing Notice of the principal events of Dr Thomson's life has been derived almost entirely from a biographical notice from the united pens of Dr Craigie and Dr William Thomson, which was inserted in the 170th number of the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*, published in 1847, and has undergone only such alterations in the present reprint as the change of circumstances, arising out of the lapse of time, seemed to require. We are tempted to subjoin to it a few extracts from a character of Dr Thomson drawn by a friendly hand in the *Scotsman* newspaper, a few days after his death.

“ We fear that we are not competent to form a just appreciation of those powers and qualities which enabled Dr Thomson to raise himself from a very humble condition of life to a distinguished place in the first rank among the practitioners of so honourable a profession, and the cultivators of so extensive and difficult a science as medicine. And yet we are reluctant that the occasion should be allowed to pass over without some attempt being made in our pages to pay a tribute to the memory of one whose talents, acquirements, and energy of

character, have for a long time largely contributed to maintain the reputation of the Medical School of Edinburgh.

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“Till he reached the age of twenty, whatever cultivation his mind received was obtained under difficulties which nothing, perhaps, could have enabled him to overcome but the consciousness of the mental powers that nature had bestowed upon him, and the inward conviction that, by the steady exercise of these, he would be able to place himself in a position more favourable than a mechanical employment, for the gratification of that thirst for information which seems to have been an inherent element of his mental constitution.

“At the age when he succeeded in overcoming his father’s reluctance to his embarking on what, in his circumstances, was a perilous enterprise, he at once entered on the cultivation of that branch of knowledge in which he was destined in after life to attain so much eminence,—as an ardent student, an acute observer, a sound reasoner, a skilful practitioner, and an enthusiastic and impressive teacher.

“As a practitioner, successively, of the two departments of medical science, surgery and physic, in each of which he may be said to have acquired the highest confidence of his professional brethren and of the public, Dr Thomson was particularly distinguished by the acuteness and promptness of his discrimination—by the rapidity with which he detected the actual position of his patient, and traced the phenomena of disease which presented themselves, or which his discriminative sagacity enabled him to bring to light, to those inward changes in the economy on which they depended.

“In proceeding to adapt the mode of treatment to be pursued to the conception which he had formed of the nature of the particular case, Dr Thomson’s first object may be said to have been to determine in his own mind what assistance could fairly be expected from those natural processes by the agency of which, in so many instances, the state of disease more or less quickly disappears, and is replaced by the state of health. It was with him a fundamental principle to secure, as he was wont to say,

“ fair play to nature.” But the same sagacity which enabled him to detect what was amiss in the economy, singularly assisted him in judging how far, in the particular circumstances, nature might be relied upon; and where such reliance seemed doubtful or hopeless, the remedial measures which he considered appropriate were prosecuted with a vigour that bore no indication of inertness or indecision. At the same time, these measures were eminently characterised by their simplicity, as he was strongly impressed with the conviction that the practitioner will effect a larger amount of good by the employment of a limited number of means, with the use of which he is familiar, than by that of a wider range of remedies, of the action of which, from their very number, he can have only an imperfect knowledge. As an operative surgeon, as well as in the character of a prescribing physician, he ever aimed at simplicity in the instruments he employed; and it was a favourite expression of his, that, in their long careers as practitioners, as well as improvers, of their respective departments of the healing art, Mr Hunter had never invented a new instrument, nor Dr Cullen introduced a new remedy.

“His intercourse with the sick was singularly agreeable, bringing into exercise not only the vigour of his understanding but the kindly dispositions of his heart. The interest which he manifestly took in the individual circumstances of his patients, speedily inspired them with the confidence that their ailments were duly considered, and understood as far as science and skill would allow; and that nothing would be neglected that could contribute to their cure or relief. In a profession singularly distinguished for the unremunerated work which it performs, Dr Thomson’s liberality was conspicuous.

“The duties of a consulting practitioner,—the form in which Dr Thomson, both as a surgeon and as a physician, had principally occasion to exercise his profession,—are apt to place him in a position of great delicacy, as between the sick or their friends, and their ordinary medical advisers. Dr Thomson’s professional brethren had a perfect assurance that in his hands their reputation was safe;—that, where the measures which had been adopted previously to his being consulted appeared to him to have been



proper, he would cordially bear testimony to the fact ; and where it might seem to stand in need of correction, that he would sedulously guard them from blame ; and that while every justice would be done to their patients, no change would be made in the mode of practice, merely to create or strengthen an impression of the expediency of his assistance or advice having been had recourse to.

“ Regarded as a cultivator of medical science, a leading feature in Dr Thomson’s character was his desire to know everything relative to the subject under consideration that had been previously ascertained, and his honourable anxiety to vindicate for every author of an original observation or opinion the claim which it might appear to give him to the gratitude of men of science. For proofs of his talents for original observation and inquiry, we may refer with confidence to his published works, as well as to the writings of several of his pupils, to whom he was ever ready, in suggesting topics for investigation, to transfer the fruits of his own, frequently laborious, inquiries. A fastidiousness in respect of publication, arising out of the difficulty he had in satisfying himself with his own intellectual performances, limited the number of his published works much below what might have been expected, and could have been desired, from one so capable of conveying instruction in an agreeable and impressive manner.

“ As a teacher, he was singularly successful in engaging the attention of his audience by the judicious selection of materials which he laid before them, as well as by his power of generalizing the results of his observation, reading, and reflection, and of presenting these results in a clear and simple form ; and above all, perhaps, the interest he himself evinced in the subject under discussion had a powerful influence in stimulating the enthusiasm and energy of his pupils. Another striking feature in his character as a teacher was the rapidity with which he discriminated the several capabilities of his students, and directed their energies into those channels in which they might be most usefully employed. To this early direction of their thoughts and pursuits, many of his more distinguished pupils have been known in after life gratefully to ascribe much of their

worldly success, and of the scientific reputation which they had acquired.

“Considering the wideness of the range of professional subjects which Dr Thomson embraced in his course of study, and the laborious manner in which he conducted his inquiries into each of them ; and considering also the impediments and interruptions arising to the prosecution of his studies, not only from his entire dependence on the fruits of his own toil, but also from the uncertain state of health which he experienced during a considerable portion of his life, it might have been supposed that even for his ardent mind the investigation of these subjects would furnish ample occupation. But this was far from being the case. Indeed, so varied were his studies, that no work, in almost any department of learning, came amiss to him ; and so accurate and extensive was his information, that he never came in contact with any person, of however different occupations and pursuits from his own, from whom he did not extract, or to whom he did not convey, information in the particular department of business or study which his companion had made the occupation of his life.

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“To the cultivation of moral science, also, he devoted much time and labour, and was extensively read in the writings that have emanated from the different schools of metaphysics. Indeed, even if his own tastes had drawn him less powerfully in that direction, his ardent admiration for Mr Dugald Stewart, and his hereditary affection for the present distinguished occupant of the chair of logic, would, in themselves, have supplied powerful motives to maintain and extend his acquaintance with this department of knowledge. As a portion of medical science, too, he felt a deep interest in the natural history and treatment of those modifications to which both the mental faculties and moral feelings are subject in the state of disease ; and in various journeys which he made both at home and abroad for the improvement of his own professional knowledge, asylums for the reception and treatment of the insane formed an object of primary interest.

“That a well-educated physician should possess some general acquaintance with several, if not with all, of the branches of knowledge to which we have referred,—and they are far from exhaust-

ing the catalogue of Dr Thomson's studies,—is what the public is prepared to expect ; but that he should possess a familiar acquaintance with their principles, doctrines, and details, so as that those who had made any one of them the object of their special study should be led by his conversation to conclude that in him they had encountered a fellow-labourer in their own department, is well calculated to excite surprise.

“ At an early period of life, and when in an humble sphere, Dr Thomson was led to adopt political opinions favourable to popular constitutional rights. These opinions he continued to retain through life ; and not conceiving that any one who lives under and enjoys the benefits of a free constitution, is entitled to withhold whatever support it may be in his power to render to free institutions, he never shrank from avowing the opinions which he entertained, and that at a time when such avowals not only closed the doors of official preferment on those who made them, but caused them to be looked on by the great body of the wealthy with suspicion, distrust, or aversion. He was no admirer, however, of extreme opinions even in favour of popular rights. He was strongly impressed with the persuasion that the gradual amelioration of political institutions is not only safer than that which is effected by sudden convulsions, but affords more security for their permanency, and that the extension of political privilege should go hand in hand with, or rather should follow in the wake of, intellectual cultivation—a persuasion which heightened all the more the interest he took in everything calculated to promote the education of the people.

“ Though ten years have elapsed since the state of Dr Thomson's bodily health obliged him to relinquish his duties as a practitioner and teacher, his mental faculties remained to the latest unimpaired, and his zeal for knowledge unabated. Up to his very last days he continued to hear with the most lively interest of what was passing both in the scientific and in the political world ; and it will be agreeable to his many friends to know, that in the full conviction which he entertained, for some weeks previously to his decease, that his period of earthly existence was hastening to a close, he contemplated the approach of death with all the dignified calmness which the consciousness of a well-spent life could inspire.”



## PUBLISHED WORKS OF DR JOHN THOMSON.

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1. The Elements of Chemistry and Natural History ; to which is prefixed The Philosophy of Chemistry, by M. Fourcroy, 5th edition, Translated, with Notes, by John Thomson, Surgeon, Edinburgh, in three volumes. Vol. i., 1798 ; vol. ii., 1799 ; vol. iii., 1800.

2. Outlines of a Plan for the Regulation of the Surgical Department of the Royal Infirmary, 1800.

3. Critical Notices of Camper's *Icones Herniarum*, Heberden's article *Ileus*, and Mr Hey's Chapter on Strangulated Hernia, with some other papers in the early volumes of the Edinburgh Review.

4. Observations on Lithotomy ; being a republication of Dr James Douglas's " Appendix to his History of the Lateral Operation for the Stone," &c., with a proposal for a new manner of Cutting for the Stone. Edinburgh, 1808.

5. Notice of a particular species of Counter-Fracture of the Base of the Cranium, in the Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal, April 1812.

6. Lectures on Inflammation, exhibiting a view of the general doctrines, pathological and practical, of Medical Surgery. Edinburgh, 1813.

A translation of this work into the German language was published by Dr Peter Krukenberg, in two volumes, at Halle in 1820 ; an Italian translation, by Dr Benedetto Barozzi, was published, in two volumes, at Pavia in 1819-22 ; and a translation into French was published, in two volumes, by MM. Jourdan and Boisseau, at Paris in 1827.

An American reprint was published soon after the appearance of the Edinburgh edition, and was again published in 1831, at Philadelphia, by Carey and Lea. (American Journal of Medical Sciences for August 1831 and February 1832.)

7. Report of Observations made in the British Military Hospitals in Belgium after the battle of Waterloo, with some remarks upon Amputation. Edinburgh, 1816.

8. An Account of the Varioloid Epidemic which has lately prevailed in Edinburgh and other parts of Scotland, with Observations on the identity of Chicken-pox with modified Small-pox, in a letter to Sir James M'Gregor, &c. &c. London and Edinburgh, 1820.

9. Historical Sketch of the Opinions entertained by Medical Men respecting the Varieties and the Secondary Occurrence of Small-pox, with Observations on the Nature of the Security afforded by Vaccination against attacks of that disease, &c. &c. London and Edinburgh, 1822.

10. Letter to Dr Duncan, junior, with respect to the Test-pock, &c., in Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal, vol. xxi.

11. Hints respecting the Improvement of the Literary and Scientific Education of Candidates for the degree of M.D., &c. Edinburgh, 1824.

12. The same, with Observations prefixed, addressed to the Royal University Commissioners. Edinburgh, 1826.

13. Additional Hints, &c.

14. The Works of William Cullen, M.D., &c. &c., containing his Physiology, Nosology, and First Lines of the Practice of Physic; with numerous Extracts from his manuscript papers and from his Treatise on the Materia Medica, in two volumes. Edinburgh, 1827.

15. Letter to the College Bailie on the Pathology Chair, 1831. Remarks on the Memorial of the Town-Council to Lord John Russell on the same subject, 1837.

16. Syllabus of Lectures on General Pathology. Edinburgh.

17. An Account of the Life, Lectures, and Writings of William Cullen, M.D., &c. &c. First volume, 1832; Second volume, 1859.

18. The article "Animal Magnetism," in the 7th edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica, 1841.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE  
OF  
DR WILLIAM THOMSON.

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WILLIAM THOMSON was born at Edinburgh on the 3d day of July 1802, and received his early education at the High School of that city, where he, while yet very young, exhibited that decided taste for literary pursuits which distinguished him through life. He was originally intended for the legal profession; but his plans were changed in 1818, in consequence of the death of his elder brother. He accordingly began his medical studies at the University and in the private school of Edinburgh in the session of 1818-19, and joined the Royal Medical Society as a member in April 1819.

In 1821-22 he passed a winter session at the University of Glasgow, in the farther prosecution of medical and philosophical studies. In 1822 he accompanied Mr Carswell to the Continent, and, during some time, assisted him in the observation and dissection of those cases of disease in the hospitals of Paris and Lyons which were the subjects of the drawings prepared by Mr Carswell for the illustration of Dr Thomson's Lectures. He extended his tour through Germany and Italy, in company with his friends the late Dr Patrick Macfarlane of Perth, and the amiable and learned Dr Ferdinand Becker, whose distinguished career as a physician and professor in Berlin was too soon cut short by his early death.

On returning from his second Continental tour in 1825, he settled in Edinburgh as a medical practitioner and teacher. He joined the Royal College of Surgeons as Fellow at this period, and was shortly afterwards elected one of the surgeons



of the New Town Dispensary. His first course of public lectures was on the Institutes of Medicine in 1826–27, which he repeated in the two following years ; but at that time, or in 1828, he was associated with his father in his Lectures on the Practice of Physic, and, in 1830, he came to assume the whole duties of that course.

William Thomson was the constant companion and assistant of his father in all his later literary labours ; and among the works of which, at the period now referred to, he assisted in the preparation may be mentioned Dr Thomson's various writings on the subject of medical education, the Life of Cullen, and the materials for the course of Lectures on General Pathology, the professorship of which was instituted in 1830.

Dr Thomson had carefully directed the education of his son towards the various topics comprised in the departments of General Pathology and Pathological Anatomy, and it was to him a source of great disappointment that his son did not obtain the chair at its first establishment, nor afterwards when he resigned the professorship. The opposition with which the institution of the chair had been received by a portion of the medical professors in the University, and a variety of other circumstances, concurred to interfere with William Thomson's promotion to the chair, notwithstanding his acknowledged high qualifications for the performance of its duties ; but he continued to assist his father in the lectures ; and afterwards, when Dr Thomson's health failed, he delivered several of the entire courses, until his appointment, in 1841, to the Professorship of the Practice of Physic in the University of Glasgow.

In 1831 William Thomson obtained the degree of Doctor of Medicine, on examination, from Marischal College and University of Aberdeen, to which he was obliged to resort in consequence of his not having studied the period required by the statutes within the University of Edinburgh. In 1833 he joined the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh as Fellow ; and in 1840, a year before he finally quitted Edinburgh, he was appointed and acted as one of the Physicians of the Royal Infirmary. It was at this time, during his attendance on the wards of the hospital, that he suffered from an attack of rheu-

matic fever, which, though it did not appear at the time to have left any very obvious injurious effects, had very probably laid the foundation of the cardiac disease of which he died twelve years afterwards.

During the fifteen years of Dr William Thomson's settlement in Edinburgh, his attention was not exclusively absorbed by professional pursuits. His energy of character, and liberal and enlightened principles, led him to take a keen interest and active part in measures of public utility, as well as of professional improvement. He acted as Secretary and Director of the School of Arts for a number of years after the departure from Edinburgh of Mr Leonard Horner, whose name was so long and well known in connection with that Mechanics' Institution. He took an active share in the proceedings of the Medico-Chirurgical Society, of which he was for a time one of the secretaries; and he also engaged zealously in the management of the affairs of the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons.

It is indicative of the confidence placed in his integrity and judgment by the members of these colleges, that he was deputed on two occasions, first in 1833, and again in 1834, to proceed as their delegate to London, to watch over the proceedings in Parliament connected with medical legislation. On the first of these occasions, he acted as delegate from the College of Surgeons; and on the second, as joint delegate along with the late Mr William Wood and Professor Christison, from the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons and the University, to endeavour to secure the interests of these several bodies in connection with the bills proposed in Parliament for regulating the education and privileges of the medical profession. It cannot be doubted, that although the conflicting interests and vested rights of the various licensing boards then opposed, and for a long time retarded, the satisfactory accomplishment of legislative enactment on this subject, the sound and enlightened opinions entertained by Dr William Thomson and his coadjutors contributed to exercise a powerful influence in checking the introduction and continuation of abuses, and in elevating the character of the measures proposed and discussed on these and various later occasions in regard to medical reform.

During the subsequent eleven years of his life, in which he resided in Glasgow College, Dr William Thomson devoted himself to the careful extension and improvement of his lectures on the practice of physic, and gave a large share of his time to the management of the internal affairs of the College and University, a task for which he was admirably suited by his accurate habits of business and sound judgment. He acted as Clerk of Faculty, or Secretary of the College, during six or seven years, and was thus necessarily closely engaged with all affairs appertaining to the management of the institution.

By his office of Professor of Medicine in the University, Dr William Thomson was a permanent Director of the Royal Infirmary, and also of the large Asylum for Lunatics at Gartnavel, near Glasgow; and he was unceasingly engaged, with assiduity and vigour, in sharing the management of these establishments. During the greater part of the same time he acted as Physician of the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, and in his turn gave the usual courses of clinical lectures in the hospital.

During the winter of 1848-49, when the office of physician-superintendent in the asylum had been suddenly left vacant, Dr William Thomson, actuated by a desire to relieve the Institution from the embarrassment which threatened it, undertook the arduous duties of that office. These duties were rendered more than usually anxious and laborious by the peculiar circumstances which had led to the vacancy, and by the prevalence of Asiatic cholera in the asylum to a great extent at the time. So virulent was the disease that it carried off more than forty inmates of the asylum during the period of Dr Thomson's attendance as physician.

The exertions of body and mind which Dr William Thomson was thus required to make during five months, in addition to his other occupations, proved too great for a constitution not naturally strong, and which, there is reason to believe, had already suffered from the inroads of the disease which ultimately proved fatal. Very soon after the conclusion of this laborious session, the symptoms of cardiac disease manifested themselves in irregularity of the heart's action, and tendency to dyspnœa on any unusual exertion. These symptoms con-



tinned gradually to increase, and within the last year of his life the signs of organic disease of the mitral valves of the heart became more and more decided.

Notwithstanding the many painful accompaniments of his disease, Dr William Thomson continued his occupations and performed his duties till within a few days of his death. He had just concluded his eleventh session in the University, when the congestion of the lungs and the difficulty which the blood experienced in returning to the left side of the heart caused intense feelings of painful anxiety and a total inability to sleep, at first in the recumbent, and afterwards in any posture. Having gone to Edinburgh on the 10th May 1852, partly with the view of consulting some of his old medical friends, the sudden increase of these symptoms proved fatal on the morning of the 12th of May of same year. Dr Thomson retained the use of all his faculties till within an hour of his death; and being fully aware of the signs of its approach, met it with that serene calmness and firm courage which were characteristic of his whole life.

Though in its public aspects Dr William Thomson's life may be said to have presented few striking events, it was not without important influences in the sphere in which he moved. He belonged to a class of men whose merits are apt not to be fully acknowledged. In him, as in all men of well constituted minds, the desire of fame was ever subordinate to higher and nobler impulses. He was too modest and unobtrusive in his nature to vindicate his claim to that share of approbation which he had justly earned; and he was much too honourable and high-minded to desire any other.

In the early part of his career he had enjoyed the privilege of a long and most intimate intercourse with his father; and no one knew better how to profit by the example, wisdom, and learning of his master. His education had been most carefully conducted in its literary and philosophical, as well as in its professional departments. His mind, already well stored, was ever on the alert to acquire new information; a sound judgment; a spirit hopeful, firm, and courageous; a charitable view of the motives and actions of others; a ready sympathy, and a wise and judicious suggestion of measures at once liberal, prac-

tical, and enlightened; a mild temper, amiable and affectionate feelings, and most unselfish disposition, combined to form his character, in itself admirable, but so unostentatious that those only who thoroughly knew him were fully aware of the genuine value of its excellence.

Among his friends and acquaintances Dr William Thomson was affectionately loved. He communicated his own spirit of fairness and dignity to all the proceedings with the management of which he was connected, and though not by nature given to what may be called the popular arts of pleasing, he yet secured the confidence, respect, and esteem of all who were brought into contact with him in public or private life. These qualities, joined to his active disposition, gave to Dr William Thomson the power of benefiting materially those institutions with the management of which he was more particularly engaged; but he also busied himself occasionally with more public measures, and as might be supposed from his education and disposition, he was a decided liberal in his political opinions, and took an active share in the discussion and promotion of all those public measures which he conceived to be for the political or social improvement of the people at large.

With medicine in general, and more especially with the literary and philosophical departments of medical knowledge, he was intimately conversant by extensive reading and study. He was not much given to speculative inquiry, preferring rather to attempt at all times the establishment of great generalized truths, to the discussion of hypothetical views however ingenious. He was an accomplished master in the exposition of complicated observations and reasoning on medical topics, and in the logical deduction of sound inferences from the most intricate and conflicting statements. Indeed, there can be little doubt that in the legal profession he would have greatly distinguished himself by his power of discriminating the essential and the real from the irrelevant and the false parts of any argument or body of evidence.

Dr William Thomson's style in writing was characterized by that union of correctness, clearness, and elegance which is only to be acquired by long practice and attentive study in the art

of composition. Though not naturally fluent, he had thus obtained the power of expressing his thoughts both orally and in writing with facility and clearness, and his acquaintance with general and medical literature gave at once elegance and copiousness to his style.

These qualities will be found to pervade his writings, a list of the more important of which will be found below.

Besides numerous pamphlets on controversial and other subjects, they consisted chiefly of original articles, and of carefully prepared digests of important subjects for encyclopædias and medical works. His Essays "On the Black Deposit in the Lungs of Miners," and on "Sloughing of portions of the Intestinal Tube," and some of his contributions to the "Encyclopædia Britannica," are deserving of special attention. His contributions are all full of well-arranged information on the subjects of which they treat; they are valuable as correct and judicious records of the state and progress of professional opinion, and more especially as bringing out more prominently those great general principles which appeared to be established on a sound induction of observation.

Dr William Thomson was married in December 1827 to Eliza Hill, second daughter of the late Mr Ninian Hill, Writer to the Signet in Edinburgh. The widow and six children survive him.

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#### PUBLISHED WORKS OF DR WILLIAM THOMSON.

1. A Probationary Essay (for the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh) "On the Extraction of Calculi from the Urinary Bladder." Edinburgh, March 1825.

2. The following Contributions to the "Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal," viz.:—"Case of Spontaneous Luxation of the Vertebra dentata," No. 121; "Abstract of Cases in which a portion of the Alimentary Canal, comprising all its Coats, has been discharged by Stool," &c., No. 125; Appendix to the same, No. 127; "Abstract of Cases in which Pseudo-membranous Substances have been discharged from the Bowels," No. 128; "Historical Notices of the Occurrence of Inflammatory Affections of the Internal Organs after Injuries and Surgical Operations," No. 141.



3. The following Articles in the 7th edition of the "Encyclopædia Britannica," viz. :—The Article "Medicine," being a General View of Medical Science and Practice; the Article "Practice of Physic," being a General View of the Sources of Difficulty and Fallacy in Diagnosis; the Article "General Pathology," being a General View of the Proximate Causes of Disease, Organic and Dynamic; the article "Plague."

4. "On Black Expectoration and the Deposition of Black Matter in the Lungs, particularly as occurring in Coal Miners," in the "Transactions of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of London," Vol. xx. London, 1837.

Second part of the same. Ibid., Vol. xxi. London, 1838.

5. A Letter to the Fellows of the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons of Edinburgh, respecting the Proposal to Abolish the Chair of General Pathology in the University. Edinburgh, 1837.

6. The Articles "Diseases of the Liver," and "Diseases of the Mesenteric Glands," in "Dr Tweedie's Library of Medicine."

7. "A Practical Treatise on the Diseases of the Liver," &c. Edinburgh, 1841.

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